THE CHINESE LABEL

J. FRANK DAVIS

For
Mrs. Alice Calhoun Harris Bas

With the Compliments of the Author

For
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THE CHINESE LABEL

Kwong Li took the paper and held it before his eyes under the light. FRONTISPIECE. *See page 279.*

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By

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

RALPH P. COLEMAN

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To

Dr. Fred Houdlett Albee

but for whose professional skill
this and many other stories
would never have been
written

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CHAPTER I

SLOWLY his livery automobile edged its way through the excited, shouting carnival crowds, while Julian Napier scanned the features of the revelers, seeking the well-remembered face of Kalat Pasha.

San Antonio's Fiesta San Jacinto was in full swing. The downtown streets and plazas swarmed from curb to curb with merrymakers and spectators, roared and echoed to shouts and laughter, to the raucous, persuading cries of street merchants, to the tooting of horns and the clatter of rattles. With their thousands of extra electric lamps and their staring, high-powered flood-lights, they were almost as bright and much more beautiful than in the sunlight. Lights and flags and banners; now and then, when there fell a lull in the turmoil of voices, rose the drone and thump of not distant bands,—and everywhere the swirling crowd, in tens of thousands.

Three days, now, Julian Napier had been in San Antonio, always seeking that one olive-tinted face.

It was a face he had not seen for more than eight years. Kalat would be looking older,

naturally, and probably somewhat disguised. His jet-black mustache, whose little ends he used to train to point upward, would probably have disappeared. He would be stouter, likely. He might not be dressed so immaculately as was his wont when Napier last saw him, in Peking. But Napier did not doubt he would know the man if they met.

He hoped Kalat would not know him. He rather thought he wouldn't. Back there in China, Yusef Kalat, although barely thirty, was already quite an important person among the lesser diplomatic representatives. Although not yet a pasha— that honor came after his return to Turkey—it was common knowledge that he stood high in the favor of some of the most powerful leaders of the Young Turk Party, then riding triumphantly on the crest of the wave at Constantinople, while Napier was merely—so far as Kalat could know—a dillydallying tourist. Not more than three men in all China knew that the young American was a representative of the Treasury Department, fitting himself by observation and study for specialization in matters Oriental, and none of the three was a person prone to babble secrets to Turks or any one else.

"I doubt very much if he knows me," Napier had told his chief, a week since at Washington, when that personage put up to him the problem that was confronting the department agents at the Mexican border. "I saw him several times in Peking and once at Shanghai, but we were

never introduced and, even if we had been, it is hardly likely he would have remembered a youngster as inconspicuous as I tried to be. I wouldn't swear he doesn't, of course; that would be foolish. But I don't think so."

"But you feel reasonably sure you would know him?"

"Positive. He isn't the sort that is easily forgotten, and he can't have changed greatly in eight years. Of course, I take it for granted he won't be passing as a Turk, or as an Armenian or Syrian, either. He will probably claim to be a Latin of some sort. His safest stunt, if he speaks the language well enough, would be to call himself a Spaniard, and he is reputed to have a great gift of tongues. As a Spaniard, in San Antonio or any other South Texas city, he wouldn't be conspicuous at all. You say you are sure he came across the border?"

"Reasonably sure. Mexico City reported he had left there, supposed to be headed for the States, and we found a record that almost certainly applies to him. He would not attempt to come in under his own name or nationality, naturally, but a man whose description tallies perfectly with his entered at Eagle Pass. He had a Greek passport in perfect order, viséed at Madrid, Havana and Mexico City. He declared nothing dutiable, was searched and found to have nothing dutiable on him. The name he gave"—the chief read from a card on his desk—"was Demitri Poulos."

"Which is exactly as valuable for identification purposes as John Smith."

"Exactly. This Demitri Poulos took a train north, probably to San Antonio. All this, you understand, had happened before our people in Mexico City got wind of the stones, or of his connection with them—before they knew anything about him at all, as a matter of fact. Well —— He didn't have the diamonds with him when he came across, so we are justified in believing they are to follow him across, if they haven't already done so. He wouldn't get any farther from the border than was necessary, if that is the case, and yet he couldn't remain inconspicuous in one of those little towns on the Rio Grande. So we are taking it for granted he went to San Antonio. Our agents there have been unable to get any track of him, but that means nothing. None of them ever saw him, and we have no photograph. So —— Well, it looks like a long shot, but I don't see anything to do but to go down there and take a thorough look-see. You are the only man in the department—at least the only one who is in America just now—who knows him."

"And when I find him, if I do, the job is just begun."

The chief nodded. "When you find him, you may be on the track of the diamonds and you may not be. But if he still had them in Spain, as our people report, and still had them in Mexico City, it means he has them in the United States—or expects to."

"It is quite certain, is it, that he had them in Mexico?"

"One of our men got a tip that he offered them to a dealer, hoping the man might be willing or able to make a trade. Perhaps a price might have been arranged, if Kalat had been willing to make enough of a sacrifice, but the jeweler had no way to get enough for the payment in gold, and naturally Kalat wasn't taking any part of his payment in Mexican paper."

"Do I understand the stones are Kalat's own property? I mean, there is no charge that they are stolen goods."

The chief shrugged his shoulders. "The Turkish government, whatever it happens to be at this moment, would undoubtedly claim they were stolen, but whether or not it could make the charge stick is something else. That is an angle we are not much interested in. So far as we are concerned, Kalat has them and, for all we know, they are his. Our interest in them ceases when they have paid a proper duty, or, if they are smuggled in, when they have been seized."

"Describe them to me more fully, will you, please? Of course I have heard of them, but I never saw them. 'The Gorgeous Lily' is the more famous of the two, I think. Is it the larger?"

"No. 'The Ray of Light' is considerably the larger; a fraction over fifty-one carats."

Napier did not attempt to conceal his surprise. "I had no idea it was as heavy as that," he

said. "Why, the Regent, in the Louvre, is a little less than three times that size, and it is valued by the French government at two million and a half dollars."

"But the Regent is regarded by experts as the world's most perfect large stone, and the Ray of Light is not perfect, either in color or cutting. There have been many stories as to its value—most of them from Turkish sources and hence to be taken with reservation. Perhaps, if it were offered in the open market, with no possibility of cloud to the title, it might bring a quarter of a million dollars. Under the circumstances, Kalat will probably feel well satisfied if he can get a hundred thousand—and let the buyer take the chance of evading the duty."

"And the Gorgeous Lily?"

"That is a much better stone. It is blue-white, well cut, and weighs forty-three and seven-eighths carats. Its intrinsic value is greater than the other. There is a rumor in Spain that Kalat offered the pair for a quarter of a million dollars gold. He would probably take two hundred thousand."

"Is there any inside information as to how they came into his possession?"

The chief shook his head.

"He just has them," he replied simply. "They were always on the sultan's sash when he appeared on State occasions, and now they are not only gone from the sash, but gone from Constantinople. Presumably they were Kalat's

share of the loot, when the smash came. The Young Turk officials, when they made their final clean-up, got away with over a hundred and twenty million dollars' worth of grand larceny. Kalat had been one of the gang, well up in the confidence of the three big fellows. Whether they divided with some of their henchmen and gave Kalat the two stones, or whether it was everybody for himself and Kalat happened to have access to the sultan's jewelry I don't know, and I doubt if anybody else knows outside the looters themselves. The world is aware that the gang made their get-away with all they needed—and the next we hear of the Gorgeous Lily and the Ray of Light, Kalat Pasha is trying to make a deal to get rid of them in Madrid."

"Then our people lost track of him, you say."

"He had powerful friends among the pro-Germans at court. We suppose—from the passport that this alleged Greek Demitri Poulos had when he entered at Eagle Pass—that things got unpleasant for Kalat in Spain, that he and his friends framed up the phony Greek papers, and that he slipped over to Havana and thence across to Vera Cruz. We are guessing at all that, however. All we know is that Kalat was in Mexico City, that he had the stones with him, failed in an attempt to sell them, and disappeared, supposed to be heading toward the States. And that Demitri Poulos came in at Eagle Pass."

Napier sat for a moment in thought. "If he

left the stones behind him to be sent in afterward, there is somebody in Mexico whom he can trust implicitly," he mused. "And a Turk seldom trusts anybody implicitly. Not a Mexican, surely, and especially not another Turk." He frowned over the problem. "He would be putting himself at the mercy of the other man; depending on nothing but the fellow's word—unless he had something on him and a way to punish him if he didn't make good."

"A man big enough to be involved with him in a scheme like this wouldn't be likely to fear many consequences."

"That is true. Which gets us back to the matter of trust. It isn't according to Oriental nature —— Wait a minute! I was thinking of *Turkish* Oriental nature. Kalat knows China. He knows, once a high-class Chinaman has given his word, palm touching palm, on the memory of his honorable ancestors —— Are there as many Chinese smugglers on the other side of the Mexican border as usual, chief?"

"More than there used to be. Mostly opium, of course."

"Is much of it getting in?"

The chief smiled wryly. "We don't know how much is getting in—but it is too much. We know how much we are seizing. Not two weeks ago we made one haul of sixty-seven five-tael cans. A jitney driver who was going back and forth a dozen times a day had it packed in the upholstery of his car. We got a good quantity

last week in the false bottom of what looked like an ordinary farm wagon. A few cans in an automobile radiator is pretty common. And that is only telling what happens at the international crossings, where they take a chance with the customs' officers. What gets in at the fords and in boats, I wouldn't pretend to estimate. We catch a lot of them, of course, but the Rio Grande is a long river."

"It is a profitable business at that, I imagine; for the fellows who stay in Mexico take no risks."

"A five-tael can is worth better than fifty dollars now on this side."

"If Kalat trusted anybody—we don't know, of course, that he did, or even positively that he is your Demitri Poulos the Greek, although it is reasonable to suppose he is—it is my guess that the chances are the man he trusted is Chinese. I think I'll nose around among the yellow people in San Antonio a bit, anyway. Are there many there now?"

"A rather large colony, I think. Some odd fact or other about its location came out in one of our reports. Oh, I have it! The city authorities abolished the old Red Light district, and a lot of handsome real estate went begging for awhile. Nobody wanted to live in that section. Then the well-to-do Chinese went in. I don't remember anything more about it, but the San Antonio office can post you on all that after you get there."

Napier rose. "I'll get to-night's train," he

said. "If Kalat is there, I'll try to locate him."

"After which," the chief smiled, "you have located nothing of any value whatever to us unless you are also able to locate the Gorgeous Lily and the Ray of Light."

Lamb, the collector of customs at San Antonio, with whom Napier conferred before he had been in the city two hours, was unable to advise any especial course of action.

"You say Kalat could easily pass for a Spaniard, or a white Mexican," he remarked. "There are at least twenty-five thousand Mexicans in San Antonio—perhaps thirty—and at least a thousand of them are white, or near enough white so that you can't be sure of the Indian strain at first glance. And a very great number, since the disorders in Mexico have located them here as refugees, are people of fine education and breeding. So you see looking for one individual who answers that description, unless you actually know him by sight, has got looking for a needle in a haystack in the list of simple sports and pastimes. We have kept our ears and eyes open for new Spaniards in town— as differentiated from Mexicans, who frequently refer to themselves here as 'Spanish,' when they are of pure white or nearly pure white blood—but we haven't got anywhere."

"Where do the best Spanish and Mexican people hang out? At what hotels and amusement places, I mean."

Lamb told him.

"And their residential section?"

"There is none. There are purely Mexican sections, where the poorer classes live—the principal one is over back of Main and Military Plazas—but the better people live anywhere and everywhere. Your man might be at any of the hotels; he might be visiting or boarding or occupying a house of his own in any of the good residential sections; or, of course, he might think he would be better buried in Little Mexico." The collector got out a map and located the purely Mexican quarter on it.

"You have a Chinese colony here, the chief told me. A new one, where the old Red Light district used to be."

Collector Lamb put his finger on a point on the map. "Right there," he said. "Across the San Pedro Creek, just behind the big Mexican quarter."

"Handy to the center of town," Napier commented. "When did this unusual influx of Chinamen take place, and where did they come from?"

"From Mexico, a good many of them. It's quite unique, how several hundred of them came to be living here, because, theoretically, they aren't supposed to be in the United States at all. They date from our little Villa adventure. When Pershing was in Mexico, he had four or five hundred Chinks working for him with the army of occupation, doing one thing or another, and when

he got his orders to forget that Villa-dead-or-alive thing, it was easy to see the finish of those Chinamen if he left them there. He was up against both Villistas and Carranzistas at that time, you know, and neither faction of the Mexicans would be friendly to anybody who had helped the gringos, and there would have been a fine open season on Chinese and their property if they had been left behind. So Pershing brought them across the border.

"A good many of them were of the menial laboring class. They were taken out to Fort Sam Houston and Camp Travis and given jobs for Uncle Sam, and they are still there, working very contentedly. A good many more were of a little better grade—small merchants and men of limited means—and a scheme was worked out whereby they could stay here 'in bond', as you might say, until it gets safe for them in Mexico. There is a representative of the Chinese government here and a representative of our government to look after them, and they report to these regularly and are allowed to come and go with almost as much freedom as anybody else, so long as they don't attempt to leave town. Not one of them, up to now, has broken his 'bond', or 'parole', or whatever you want to call it. When there is a government in Northern Mexico strong enough to protect them, and willing to, they will be sent back."

"And these compose this new colony?"

"Partially. But there are a lot of other new-

comers, not 'in bond', who say they came from Southern California and other places where Chinese have been thick for years. I suppose a good many of them did; it isn't susceptible to proof that any of them didn't, anyway. If a few of them succeeded in slipping across the border, they don't boast of it—and their papers appear to be all right. You know how much that 'papers in order' business means, or doesn't. If any Chinaman ever died in this country and his papers weren't left where they could be used over again by some Chink who didn't have any of his own, I never heard of it."

"Is there anybody here among the more prosperous Chinese who is under suspicion of being mixed up in opium smuggling?"

The collector shrugged his shoulders and grinned. "Every Chinaman in America is under suspicion of being an opium smuggler," he asserted. "But we haven't anything on any of these fellows that live in the new district. They live quietly, keep to themselves and seem to mind their own business. We see what they appear to be doing; but what they really do or what they really think, of course, is beyond me. I confess it cheerfully and brazenly. I can make a guess at what a *pelado* Mexican will do or think under a given combination of circumstances, but the Oriental mind is a sealed book. My experience in the customs game has been the Mexican border and points East."

" Most of these people have some way of making a living here, I suppose."

" Yes. In the restaurant and grocery business, principally."

" Who is the leading citizen of the colony? "

The collector considered this thoughtfully. " I can tell you who is the best known among Americans. He runs a very decent restaurant, over on Stonewall Street, right in the heart of town, and seems to have plenty of capital. His name is Charles Toy."

" Know anything about him? "

" Very little, except that he isn't one of the ' in bond' gang. He has been here about three years. He runs an orderly place, has never had any trouble with the police, so far as I have heard, and our customs agents' work has never led in his direction. A rather tall, stout, dignified old party with spectacles—and American clothes, of course."

" Why of course? "

"No Chinaman in San Antonio ever appears in public in Chinese clothes. A relic, I suppose, of the days when the cowboys would have played horse with them if they did."

Napier returned to the subject of Spanish crowds, in which he might find the face of Kalat Pasha.

" You will see crowds enough here next week," Lamb told him. " The Fiesta opens on Monday. Everybody in town will be out on the main streets at one time or another. It isn't unusual for fifty

or sixty thousand people to get out to see any one of the big parades."

So for lack of any better system, Napier had circulated through the crowds; in the lobbies of the big hotels, as busy now as they had been in the height of the winter tourist season; in hotel dining rooms and restaurants; on the sidewalk in front of theatres and moving-picture houses, while audiences were gathering and being dismissed; through the downtown streets and plazas, sometimes afoot, more often in a slow-moving automobile, scrutinizing the throngs intently, always hoping to catch a glimpse of Kalat's distinguished features. Several times he had thought his quest was to be rewarded; then the man would turn his head, or laugh, or speak, and he would realize that this was only another handsome Mexican. The recurrence of these experiences emphasized how correct had been his opinion that Kalat would have no difficulty, so far as appearance was concerned at least, in passing as Spanish.

Napier was not at all discouraged. Almost infinite patience is a first qualification for success in the Treasury Department secret service, and only three days had elapsed; if he found his man in a week or a fortnight he would be fortunate.

Except for the customs collector and two or three of the agents at the Treasury Department in the Federal Building, he had seen no one he knew. In all the thousands of eyes into which he had looked, none had twinkled with the faint-

est sign of recognition. But now, early in the evening of the first big pageant, when the crowds were gathering to welcome the King of the Fiesta and to witness the ceremonies of presenting him the keys of the city, a woman smiled at him and bowed.

He recognized her instantly and bowed in return; then he had passed her. She was standing at the curb in a group of well-dressed people, and even in a city where beautiful women are by no means rare, she was one to command more than a transient look from any eye. Napier knew she must be nearly forty; it was five years since he had seen her, and she had been in her early thirties then, but her looks denied it. It was to be presumed that artistry had some share in the freshness of her complexion, and the artificial illumination, bright as it was, would be kind to her, but his feeling, nevertheless, was one of surprise at her youthfulness.

Twice or three times he had met her, in Paris. They had been members of a dinner party, with the theatre afterward. He had run into her, a week later, in the mob at an official reception. She was Madame Frezzi, supposed to be Italian; he recalled that some of the people at the dinner party had called her "Madame Lucia." He had asked Brainard, at the American Embassy, at a convenient moment, who and what she was.

"A beautiful lady with an absent husband," Brainard had laughed. "And further than that,

deponent saieth not, because deponent knoweth not. She has money; you can see that from her jewelry. And good breeding; that is obvious. And powerful friends. And that is about as far as I can go. It has been gossiped that she has been not without influence with members of the Chamber of Deputies, but she is no ordinary lobbyist. We have thought, at times, she might be on somebody's secret diplomatic staff, which would presumably mean Italy's, but we've never felt sure. These Latin peoples keep so many beautiful women at the capitals of other governments, you can't hope to keep track of all of them."

What, he wondered idly, was Madame Lucia, former frequenter of Parisian salons, doing in America,—especially away down here in the Southwest. The matter did not intrigue him greatly; for all he knew she might have been living in the United States four years or more. What more natural, in that event, than that she should go a-touring to witness an American carnival that gave promise of having an interesting Latin color. He would keep his eyes open for her at the hotels, he thought. He would need to remember how Brainard had identified him, at the moment of their introduction. Merely as a traveling American, he recalled. She would have no knowledge of his connection with the government; he, too, if they met, would be a tourist.

Mounted policemen came clattering, ordering

vehicles from the streets that formed the path for the coming parade, and he descended from his car, arranged for it to wait in a side street, and mingled afoot with the crowds. He had an impulse to return to where he had seen Madame Lucia, but the throng was too solid for him to reach there before the head of the parade arrived, and after the procession had passed he gave the idea up; it was unlikely she would be in the same place. He found his car again and had his driver edge into the stream of automobiles that was filtering from every side into the principal streets, now again open to vehicular traffic.

They were slow processions, two in each street, passing one another in compact lines, every chauffeur on the alert to avoid pedestrians who walked and ran and skipped and shouted between the curbs. The downtown streets in Fiesta week belong to those afoot; vehicles, there by sufferance of the masses who walk, must watch their brakes. The long lines of cars barely crawled, a matter which worried none of their occupants; if they had been in haste they would have taken other and parallel streets. There were frequent blockades and jerky stops and starts.

During one of these stops Napier became suddenly conscious of a face in an automobile directly opposite him and not four feet distant, the face of a girl, strange and yet hauntingly familiar. As their eyes met, he had the temptation to bow and the immediate afterthought that he ought not; that he did not really know her.

Then, before he had fairly reached this conclusion, the girl's face lighted with recognition, she bowed and smiled quite cordially, and, although he could hear nothing above the racket of the cars and crowds, he thought her lips shaped the words, "Why, Mr. Napier!"

The little traffic blockade broke and she was gone. And still, although he had returned the bow and smile with a feeling that this could not be a mistake, that he knew the girl perfectly, and that it was only an embarrassing mental lapse that prevented his recalling who she was, her name refused to come to him. She was plainly a girl of class, such as he might have met at the home of some friend; in fact, his mind held a distinct impression that his meeting with her had been purely social. Some chance acquaintance in Washington or New York, perhaps, down here for the carnival. He started to put it from his mind as quite unimportant, reminding himself that one cannot hope to remember every girl one meets for a moment and exchanges a dozen sentences with, even as pretty a girl as this one, but, somehow, he could not. Some subconscious force was urging him to try to place her.

Although his eyes had been all for the girl, it came to him that in the tonneau beside her had sat an elderly man, thin, grim and rather striking in appearance, although there was absolutely nothing familiar about his face. An old army man, perhaps; the way he held his shoulders would fortify that guess. Vaguely the girl be-

gan to associate herself in his mind with some quite unusual occasion. Some army occasion? Yes. A tea table? Yes, he thought so, but not an ordinary tea table in an ordinary place. Had it been at some army officer's home? Somewhere abroad? In Europe or the East? Could it have been ——

"Turn around! Quick! I've got to follow a car we just passed!" he snapped at his chauffeur.

He recalled it now as though the incident had taken place that afternoon.

The last time he had seen that girl was in Shanghai, and she was playing tennis with Yusef Kalat.

CHAPTER II

"PROUD chance!" remarked the chauffeur, unemotionally, sounding his horn and twisting his wheel to miss by a hair a twelve-year-old Mexican boy who had dashed from the curb as though not an automobile existed in the world. "Even if there wasn't no crowd, it's against traffic rules. I can turn off at the next corner if you want."

Napier leaned out, looking back. His impulse was to leap to the ground and overtake the other car on foot. How hopeless this would be he realized when he saw how jammed and slow-moving were the thousands that blocked the street. Besides, the girl must be at least two blocks away by now. Her car might even have turned into another street.

"Get out of this crowd," he commanded his driver. "Go to the left and let's get around into Alamo Plaza. Maybe we'll meet it again."

"Can't go to the left—not for five blocks, anyway. Special rules this week don't let us cut across the cars that are coming the other way, not in these streets."

Napier fumed impatiently. "To the right, then. Get out of the crowd any way you can, and go around it somehow. There isn't a chance in a hundred we can find that car, but we'll try to."

The chauffeur obeyed intelligently. Out of the crowd, around blocks where traffic was light, into the congested streets and plazas again, out of them and into them. A hundred to one did not express the slimness of the chance; it was nearer a thousand to one. But not for nearly two hours, when the brimming streets had spilled most of their human floods toward the residential districts and there were hardly more people abroad than there would be on a fairly busy night of an ordinary week, did Napier give it up.

Sharper and more distinct, as this time passed, the picture of where and how he had met the girl came back to his mind.

A long, wide veranda. Women in summery gowns, men in business clothes, in flannels, a few in uniform. The clatter of horses' hoofs, the alighting of their riders, the high-pitched, clacking dialogue of the horseboys who led the animals away. A buzz about him of well-bred voices. Talk of the current social affairs, of the latest diplomatic gossip, of who lost last night at bridge and who hoped to win to-day at golf. A babel of tongues, in which English predominated. Pink faces and sallow ones, tanned faces and olive ones; above the blue robes of the servants who came noiselessly to serve tea at the teakwood tables, faces yellow, narrow-eyed, expressionless.

Broad lawns and spacious athletic grounds. A straight white road, beyond it fields of lush green, a native hamlet in the middle distance and, far across the plain, the graceful, glistening tiers

of the Porcelain Pagoda. A sunshiny afternoon in spring at the Bubbling Well Road Country Club.

"Oh, Mr. Napier!" A pleasant, drawling American voice; a handsome, stylishly garbed woman of middle age. "Won't you have your tea with us?"

He dropped with pleasure into the seat she indicated; he had not been sure of seeing anybody he knew, although one who had a guest card at the Bubbling Well Club could nearly always reckon on finding acquaintances there on a pleasant afternoon. Not until he was seated did it occur to the woman to introduce the girl at her side:

"Haven't you two ever met? I thought of course you had. Let me present Mr. Napier, Miss Glenn. Miss Glenn is an army girl; from my State—Ohio, you know."

Miss Glenn was a very attractive girl, undeniably, but as he now recalled the meeting, he realized why her face seemed only partially familiar an hour ago. The Miss Glenn of the tea across the teakwood table was a young person of sixteen, or perhaps seventeen. Eight summers and winters had rolled by since then. She had grown up.

Her recognizing him so quickly was quite a different matter. He had changed very little.

He could not definitely recall a thing they had said. There had been the usual reference to common acquaintances, perhaps some inter-

change of customary triteness regarding the East, and he vaguely recollected a bit of talk regarding army posts at which the girl had lived. She mentioned, he remembered, that she was going to play tennis that afternoon; she was in clothes suitable for the game and had a racquet case.

He remembered he had tried to make himself agreeable in a perfunctory sort of way, and that she had seemed to be very pleasant and unaffected, with the frank sophistication that comes to American girls from much travel and cosmopolitan acquaintanceship. "A nice kid," had been his thought of her in after days so long as he had remembered her, which was not long. His holiday was ending that afternoon; he returned to Peking the following morning; once there, he had many things to think of more engrossing than pretty American sub-debutantes.

Other people came to their table, and Miss Glenn finally left, with some girl of her own age—an English girl, he thought—to join a party of young people in a farther corner of the veranda. After a while he, too, had seen some other acquaintances, and had excused himself and gone over to their table. It had been some time after this that he observed the arrival of Yusef Kalat Bey.

The Oriental, in flannels and carrying a racquet, came up the steps of the veranda and swept it with his eyes, bowing once or twice to acquaintances before he located Miss Glenn. Then he

hurried over to her side, and together they departed in the direction of the tennis courts, chatting and laughing.

All this made almost no impresson on Napier at the moment. He had no interest in Miss Glenn, and Kalat Bey was to him merely a very good-looking young representative of the Ottoman Empire of whom older men said he promised to go quite a way in diplomacy. Napier might hardly have noticed the girl's partner had not two dowagers, sitting near enough to his table so that their voices carried that far—and not at all careful whether they were overheard or not—seen fit to make comment, after the fashion of piazza dowagers the world over.

"There goes Ruth Glenn with that young Turk again. If I were her father ——"

"He's a pretty decent young man, isn't he?" the other half defended, when the first left her sentence significantly unfinished. "I'll say this for him: I wish some of our own young men were as invariably polite as he is. And as for the Glenn child —— It is just a matter of playing tennis together, isn't it?"

The woman who had introduced the subject—she looked to be the elder of the pair—disposed of the whole matter in five short words:

"A Turk is a Turk."

Napier tried, now, to remember whether or not he had ever heard anything about Miss Glenn's father. If he were mentioned during that tea-table meeting he could not recall it, nor

did he remember ever having known an American army officer of that name in the East. This, he had to admit, by no means proved that he had not; in China, Japan, the Philippines and Honolulu he had run into at least a hundred whose names he did not recall. If he had met one named Glenn after his introduction to the girl, he probably would have noted the name, but this brief meeting at the Bubbling Well Road Club was almost on the eve of his leaving China for home.

Was the tall, grim man in the automobile her father? He wasn't in uniform, and her father would hardly be old enough to have been retired for age. Would it be possible to find them at a hotel, or were they perhaps permanent residents of San Antonio, as so many retired army people are? Were they here because Kalat Pasha was here, or was their presence a mere coincidence?

He decided, at last, that there was no chance whatever of finding the automobile and its occupants that night. "We'll call it a day," he told the chauffeur. "Get back to the hotel."

The big, high-ceilinged lobby of the Bonham was filled with people as he entered after dismissing the motor. He made his way to the desk and called for his room key. A soft voice at his elbow, as he turned from the desk, accosted him:

"Excoose me. You are Meester Napier?"

He felt sure the man had not just crossed the floor toward him, but had been standing there when he came. From this, before he answered,

he deduced that the other did not know him by sight, but had ascertained the number of his room and had been waiting for him to call for the key.

"Yes," he replied.

"If I could spik to you, pliz, a moment ——"

The man was a Mexican, young, perhaps not much over twenty, neatly but not expensively dressed. His manner was excessively polite and the smile that he was displaying for Napier's benefit was ingratiating but not pleasant. Three other things beside the smile Napier noted as his eyes appraised the youth's face: He had a slight but not especially disfiguring scar near the angle of the left jawbone, under the ear; his skin bore a rather striking and unhealthy pallor; and there was a story in the pupils of his eyes,—a story easy to read by any physician or any student of men who had lived long in the East. Two facts about the youth Napier determined in one glance; he had at some fairly distant time been nicked across the jaw by the blade of a knife, and he was an addict to some form of drug.

"What about?"

Napier's tone was frankly suspicious,—the tone one uses to the pan-handler who seeks to gain time to recount his woeful explanation of why he requires, at once, a bit of financial assistance. The Mexican continued to smile, taking no offense.

"No," he said quickly. "You have guess' me wrong. I am not asking you to do me any favor

at all. I have a message for you. A message that ees in confidence."

He giggled slightly, a bit unsteadily, and Napier saw that he was unnaturally elated; he had soothed himself with his drug not long before and was distinctly under its influence. "No," he went on, and again he laughed a little. "No favor for me at all. It ees a favor for you."

Napier moved with him away from the busy counter and across the lobby to a comparatively open space.

"It ees a message," the Mexican said, still giggling a little. "From a lady who smiled at you this evening, Meester Napier. A lady you have not see' for a long time. She says she guess you will know from that who I mean."

"What is her name?"

"Excoose," the man apologized. "She did not say to spik her name." He added unconvincingly: "I do not know her name."

"How did she know where to find me? And how did you know me when I came?"

"She told me to go to the beeg hotels. I happen' to come to this one first. As to knowing you—she describe' you ver' good, so when you call' for the key I have no doubt." Again a little giggle. "She said you would be a ver' handsome, ver' dark man. She especially describe' the eyes. Oh, yes. That lady describe' you perfect. So. She sends you this message. She wishes to see you—to-night. Now."

"Where?"

"I am to show you. I will go out from here and you will follow me, pliz. We will not walk together. There is good reason for that. You will follow me, and we will come to that place where the lady waits. Ees that not—fair enough?"

Napier did not at all relish the leer that accompanied the Mexican's attempt at American slang. He could not see what reason Miss Glenn would have for sending for him at such an hour, nor did he like her choice of a messenger, but he felt intensely annoyed at the inference the man had obviously gained from his errand. Although, until this moment, he had been searching nearly two hours for the girl, his impulse now was not to see her until to-morrow; as she wanted to see him, it was safe to presume this could be arranged. And then a new idea came into his mind, a thought that he should have had from the beginning and would have had, except that his brain was filled with the desire to locate the girl in the automobile, to the exclusion of all other ideas.

Why was he taking it for granted the message came from Miss Glenn? Two women had smiled at him that night.

CHAPTER III

"WHERE was I when the lady smiled?" he demanded.

"In an automobile," the Mexican replied promptly. "Yes, I didn't remember to spik of that. She said in an automobile."

"And she? Where was she?"

"She did not say."

"Describe her."

Again the Mexican's face bore that insinuating leer, and again he giggled offensively. "She is a ver' pretty lady," he said. "Yes, sir. She ees certainly"—again he went after the American way to say it—"a peach of a good-looker."

Napier was both irritated and disgusted, and it was getting well along toward midnight.

"Tell the lady it was very late when you found me," he said shortly, "and that I should be glad to have her call me here at the hotel by 'phone."

"Excoose," the man insisted. "She said I was to bring you back with me—*pronto*. She said I should tell you you better come. She said it would help you in your beesness."

"What is my business?" Napier threw at him, and from the way the Mexican shrugged and grinned he knew the fellow hadn't the slightest idea.

"Search me."

Napier considered rapidly. It could be possible, although highly improbable, that either of the two women who had recognized him smilingly might have an inkling of his real occupation, and certainly, if the one who had sent the messenger were Miss Glenn, there was pretty good ground for believing she could help him if she desired. More likely, of course, the message didn't mean what it sounded as if it might mean, at all, and yet ——

"How far is it? I suppose I could get a car," he decided.

"No." The Mexican's negative was emphatic. "We cannot go in a car. We cannot go together at all. You will follow me, a little way behind. There is good reason for that. The lady said so herself. It ees not such a much of a distance."

"All right. Wait here until I go to my room for a minute."

The Mexican must have solaced himself with his drug not long before Napier arrived, for its influence on him was becoming more pronounced. He laughed shrilly.

"Fair enough!" he cried. "Fair enough! You want to go to your room and leave your money, for fear this ees some leetle game to rob you or something. All right, meester. Go leave your money. But I do not need it. Poof! I am neither robber nor beggar."

Into a waistcoat pocket, a bit hysterical and

altogether reckless, he thrust hurried fingers, and brought out folded bills. There seemed to be several, and one of them, at least, was yellow. "Jus' to show you I do not need your money," he giggled, "and that you do not need to be afraid of me at all. A beeg man like you could not be afraid of a leetle fellow like me anyway, I guess."

Out of his pocket, when he dragged forth the bills, another paper came, and slipped to the floor. It, too, was folded, and Napier's eyes fell upon it as it came to rest on the tiling. In the clear illumination of the lobby it shone luridly,—a paper of a bright orange tint, with black markings of a most unusual character. Chinese ideographs.

The Mexican looked down and saw the paper at his feet. He made a hasty swoop, and it disappeared in his pocket. He caught his breath and looked about him, giggling no longer. It was very obvious he was frightened.

A light-skinned, foreign-looking man of middle age, who would have been quite handsome were it not for large pock-marks on either side of his nose, had dropped into a chair a dozen feet away since Napier and the youth began to talk, and buried himself in the folds of an evening paper. When the orange slip went fluttering to the floor his eyes fixed themselves on it. He was again behind his paper when the youth, after salvaging it, looked in his direction.

"I'm not especially afraid of you," Napier re-

marked, coldly. "At the same time I'll feel just as safe if you know I haven't got enough on me to make any hold-up worth while. I'll go to my room, and be right down again."

The Mexican seemed glad to find an excuse to make for the open air. He had been surprisingly shaken and sobered by the sight of the carelessly exposed orange-colored paper, and Napier thought he knew why.

"You will see me outside, on the street by the corner," the man said. "Pliz do not spik to me after we are out on the street, and pliz do not come too close to me. When we get to that house where we are going, I will show you."

"Wait a minute," Napier called, as the other turned. "What is your name?"

The Mexican hesitated almost imperceptibly. "José Garcia," he said. Napier knew there were probably at least two hundred José Garcias in San Antonio, and he felt sure this pallid little man was not one of them.

"All right," he said, shortly. "I'll follow you."

The little Mexican was trying to get his nerves in hand. These words suggested a bit of ancient American slang. He achieved a hysterical giggle and replied:

"That's right. You follow me, meester, and you'll wear diamonds."

How jangled were his nerves was demonstrated by the way he shrilled the sentence. The

last word he almost shouted. He turned and went out through the side door.

Napier entered an elevator and hurried to his room. He opened his trunk and took two articles from the tray. One, a little businesslike automatic pistol, he dropped into the side pocket of his light overcoat. The other, a small, rectangular, flat electric flashlight, he tested and stowed in his hip pocket. He started to close the trunk, remembered the Mexican's suggestion about money and thought well of it, hid all the cash he had in his pockets except less than twenty dollars, locked the trunk, went down and left his room key at the desk, and passed out to the street.

The messenger stood at the nearby corner, staring at a window display. As Napier swung toward him he turned away and went around the corner, headed west.

From the side entrance, the middle-aged man with the pock-marks down the sides of his nose, who had remained engrossed in his newspaper until Napier came down in the elevator, watched them both out of sight. As soon as he was certain of the direction they had taken, he turned briskly and hurried toward the telephone pay station. Nearly there, he had an afterthought. He spun on his heel, left the hotel by the main entrance and crossed the street to the entrance of a big business block. In the open and deserted lobby of that building was a coin-in-the-slot telephone booth. He entered it, closed the door be-

hind him carefully, and called a number. When, after much impatience, he had secured the person he wanted, he spoke rapidly in Spanish:

"Villabosa is talking. Attend, and do not ask questions. This must be told to the old man at once. Without a minute's delay. You know the little man of the angels—do you get who I mean? It is better to speak no names."

"Once of the city Piedras Negras?" the voice at the other end of the wire asked.

"You have it. Now listen. He has just met a man, an American, and is leading him in the direction of—of the big house—the house with the safe padlocks. Understand?"

"Yes."

"He approached the American. I could not hear what they said, except one word. Tell the old man the word was 'diamonds.'"

"Yes."

"And attend to this. Tell the old man also that he has the label that was lost."

"Who has?"

"The little man. He showed it to the American."

"The fool. He must be ——"

"Do not comment, but give the message at once. They are afoot, and have just left downtown—five minutes ago. They will not walk fast, probably. You have fifteen minutes, perhaps twenty. Tell the old man the little one did not see me. He does not suspect he is watched; if he did, he would not be doing it."

"But —— Why do you think they are going to the place you mention?"

"The label came from there, did it not? Is it not plain the house is to be pointed out?"

"But why?"

"How do I know? To be robbed, perhaps. But let the old man consider that. Tell him."

"Within two minutes. Is that all?"

"Yes. No, wait. The label that was lost is in his right-hand lower vest pocket. That is all. Good-night."

Back across the street to the Bonham hurried the light-complexioned man with the pock-marked nose, and into the lobby, which he did not leave to go to his room for more than an hour. During that hour he talked to two night clerks, a cashier, a porter and two other hotel guests. At nearly one o'clock he compared his watch with the hotel clock ostentatiously, and made comment on the time. He impressed on a number of people the fact that he was continuously present; to any one who knew what he had witnessed there in the lobby and of the warning he had telephoned (if there had been any such person) it would have been obvious that the man was establishing a perfect alibi.

Julian Napier followed the little Mexican, who did not hurry. With the American half a block or more behind, they sauntered two blocks west and turned to the south. They came out, presently, into Main Plaza, and went past great canvas-walled carnival shows, the platforms be-

fore their gaudily decorated fronts now deserted, and past little booths with cane-boards, wheels of fortune, and similar games, a few of them still open and surrounded by lingering groups over whose heads came the hoarse monotone of the barkers, urging their hearers to part with a few more nickels and dimes before leaving.

They came into the shadow of the Cathedral, went through the still street past the ancient Moorish dome that marks the original church of the mission fathers, and came into Military Plaza, where they skirted more tents and booths and passed out to the west, into a narrow street. After a little they turned to the left. They had left the sounds of the plazas far behind and these thoroughfares were deserted and silent. Ahead, the Mexican went on, not rapidly but unhesitatingly. Napier lost sight of him sometimes in the shadows, only to see him again under the lights at street corners. He presumed his guide had satisfied himself, from time to time, that he was being followed, but not once had he paused, or seemed to look behind.

The way led through darker, narrower streets. Napier, visualizing the map Lamb, the collector, had shown him, would have appreciated that they were in the borders of the big Mexican quarter even if occasional signs in Spanish and the appearance of the houses had not advertised it. To the west of them, not more than two or three blocks distant, would be the new Chinese colony. Napier remembered the staring black ideo-

graphs on the orange slip that the Mexican had dropped.

He saw his guide pass under the rays of a dim light, half a block ahead, turn slowly to the right, and disappear. The manner in which he changed his direction indicated that he wanted it especially noted. Napier came to the light, himself passed it, and saw, in the darkness at the side of the street, a greater darkness that he made out to be the yawning mouth of a little street or alley, into which the Mexican had vanished.

He approached the alley with caution; he liked neither its looks nor its intense silence. The thoroughfare—if it could properly be called that—was barely a dozen feet wide. Looking westward into it he could make out nothing but high walls of stone on either side, the rear walls, he took it, of estates fronting on other streets. He could see almost nothing, as he stopped at the entrance, but far in the distance, nearly through to the next street, he thought he heard retreating footsteps. Convinced that the Mexican was still ahead of him, he slipped his automatic out of his pocket, saw that its safety catch was adjusted, and stepped into the lane.

It was paved and smooth walking. His eyes became a little used to the darkness after a moment, and he moved on more confidently. He had come perhaps ten yards from the street when he stumbled, stepped on something that yielded sickeningly, and heard at his feet a faint, gasping groan. He recoiled with a leap, getting

his back against the wall and holding his pistol ready.

No further sound came from the object he had stumbled over. No sound came from anywhere in the alley. The footsteps at the farther end had now faded from hearing. The silence was oppressive, sinister. He listened intently; changed his position without noise; got out his flashlight.

Its sudden beams fell upon the figure of a man, sprawled face down upon the flagstones. They fell, also, upon a red stain that glistened on his coat, just beneath the left shoulder, and trickled darkly away across the pavement. One other thing the light showed, before Napier turned it to sweep in every direction and prove that he was alone except for the prone figure,—an arm outstretched, a clenched fist, and in its fingers a bright fragment of orange-colored paper.

Napier approached, leaned over, and turned the man face upward.

A little knife scar showed under the left ear, at the angle of the jaw. The face was chalky white. The eyelids that fluttered faintly at the glow of his lamp shaded eyes in which the pupils were drug-contracted.

"He didn't get it," whispering lips declared. "He tried—but I took it back. I got it back. And then he ran."

"Who?"

The question fell on deaf ears. Napier did not think the man even knew him.

"It was on the box. I heard them talking."

The eyelids fell and raised again with mortal weariness. "Twenty boxes I brought," the youth faltered, while Napier's ear went nearer and nearer his lips to catch the words. "Twenty boxes. And it was in one of them. I didn't know. I thought they were all alike. And they were foolish to talk of it. They didn't know I heard."

The eyes closed and the youth groaned faintly.

"Who?" Napier demanded, close to his ear. "Who did it?"

"All—alike—and they were foolish. . . . They took off the label. And talked, not knowing I could hear. With the label off, it looked just like the rest—but they put it away—by itself. . . . Then I stole the label. . . . Twenty all alike, but in only one the diamond. I didn't know. Would I have delivered it to them if I had known about the diamond? *Por el nombre de Dios,* no!"

"Listen! Who did you deliver it to?"

He could barely make out the broken ramblings that were not an answer: "I carried a message—— . . . She said just a little—extra errand—for a little—extra money. . . . They were sure to kill me—if they ever—found out. . . . I took—a chance. . . . They—were—sure—to ——"

A struggling breath rattled past his throat. His eyelids snapped wide open and the pinpoint pupils of his eyes, unblinking, stared into the vistas of a far country.

CHAPTER IV

NAPIER switched off his lamp and strained his ears. The faintest rustle of a breeze in the branches of invisible trees beyond the wall was all he heard. He bent over the body again, illuminated the clenched hand, and gently withdrew the orange paper from the fingers. It was only a part—perhaps a quarter—of the slip that had fallen from the Mexican's pocket back in the Bonham. The remainder had been torn away. Two Chinese characters were left.

Observing first that there were no stains of blood upon the fragment, Napier carefully put it in his own pocket. He felt in the vest pocket from which the slip had fallen, back at the hotel, and to which the Mexican had returned it together with his little roll of money, and found it empty. A hasty sweep of his light's rays about the ground failed to show any further trace of the torn paper.

He carefully concealed his pistol and stepped quickly back to the street through which he had come. Not a soul was in sight in either direction.

While he hesitated, puzzling how best to give the alarm, a figure came around a corner to the north, a block and half away, and under the light

he caught the glint of a silver badge. He cupped his hands and shouted: "Help! Police! Hurry!"

He went a few steps toward the officer, who came on the run, and met him under the street light by whose rays he had seen the little Mexican turn aside into the dark passage. "I just stumbled over the body of a man there in the alley," he told the policeman. "He is dead."

The officer's hand went to the butt of his pistol and hitched it more conveniently toward the front. "We'll take a look," he said, producing a flashlight. "Come on."

He was a dark-skinned man, at least quarter and probably half Mexican, Napier thought, and looked very competent. He stooped not more than five seconds over the corpse; then straightened and blew several sharp blasts on his whistle. His light swung suddenly to take in Napier's figure, and the treasury agent had a feeling that in the dense shadow behind the glare was a hand that would not hesitate to produce and use firearms.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"My name is Napier. I am stopping at the Bonham."

"What are you doing over here at this hour of the night?"

Napier did not choose to identify himself to a mere patrolman if it could be avoided. It struck him that perhaps well-dressed men wandering through this part of town after midnight might naturally have reasons that would not lend them-

selves to discussion without being at all criminal, and he tried to give the policeman the idea that his presence was the outcome of some romantic adventure.

"I had a little errand over this way," he said.

"Where?"

"I'd rather not tell you exactly where, if you don't mind. It is a sort of personal matter."

"You can tell me, or you can go to the station and tell the cap'n," the officer decided promptly.

"That's all right. I'll be glad to have you take me to the station, and I'll tell the captain if he insists. I am not anxious to get away, and I had nothing to do with this killing."

The officer hurled a suspicious question:

"How do you know he was killed?"

"He was on his face—I turned him over to see if he was alive—and I saw where he was knifed. A man can't stab himself in the back."

"You saw? How?"

"I have a flashlight."

Approaching, a block away, sounded the clatter of a swift-moving horse's hoofs.

"Get out ahead of me toward the street," the policeman commanded. He followed Napier to the alley entrance, at which a mounted officer drew up just as they reached it and slid swiftly to the ground. From the opposite direction came the pounding footsteps of a man running, and another policeman turned a corner into sight.

"Man dead in the alley," the first officer told

the horseman sharply. "Knifed in the back. You better telephone the sergeant; he'll want to get word to the coroner and send some detectives over."

The other patrolman had arrived, and the mounted officer, with a curious look at Napier but no words to waste, threw his leg over the saddle and went galloping back in the direction of town. The first policeman explained the trouble to the newcomer in two sentences, and Napier returned with them into the alley.

"Say, Guerra, I ought to know that guy," the newcomer explained, as the flashlight fell on the Mexican's features. "I'm sure I know him, but the name don't come to me. They look so different when they're croaked."

"Name is Angel Puenta," Guerra told him. "I know him well. He's a hop-head."

"Sure! Angel Puenta," the other agreed. "Of course I know him. They had him at headquarters on some dope charge and couldn't make it stick. He had an alibi or sump'n."

"He was friends with some of them Chinks over back here. He was working with them on the hop-peddling, if you ask me—but I couldn't prove it. . . . Suppose you range around a little and see if you can find the knife—or I will. The other one can stay with the body and this man."

The second officer looked at Napier almost as if he had just realized his presence. "He found him," Guerra explained.

" What was you doing here, mister? " the other asked.

" Just passing through."

" Going where? "

" I already told this officer I'd rather not say—unless the captain insists. I'll be glad to go to the station and talk it over with him."

" Sure," the officer replied. " Of course you'll go to the station. And then you'll tell the cap'n. You might's well have it over with."

" How come you stopped to get out a light and look the body over? " Guerra asked. " Seems to me you didn't act as scared as some folks would if they fell over a dead body in the dark thataway."

" I've seen a good many dead people, at one time and another," Napier answered.

" Humph! " sniffed the policeman. " Well," to his colleague, " I'll scout around and see if I can find a knife, or anything." This he proceeded to do, without success. An automobile roared up to the mouth of the alley while he was still searching, and four men in civilian clothes tumbled out and came hurrying.

Guerra quickly put them in possession of all the information he had.

" He might 'a' thrown the knife over one of these walls," one of the detectives said. " You better take that end, Morgan. Search all the yards along both sides of the alley. It's a pretty blind hunt without the knife." He turned to Napier, half menacingly. " You don't hap-

pen to have a knife anywhere on you, do you?"

"Nothing bigger than a pocket knife," Napier smiled. He had met many detectives, and knew they could usually be depended upon to run true to form. These did not suspect him of really being concerned in this crime any more than the policemen did; the manner of all of them clearly proclaimed it. But he did not expect police detective methods to be substantially different in San Antonio from what they are in New York or Omaha or Cincinnati or Portland, and he was more amused than surprised at the next development.

The detective who had given orders, evidently in charge of the case, flashed a sudden light in his face and spoke with conviction:

"Oh, yes," he said. "I know you perfectly well. How long you been in town?"

Napier knew that not only had the detective probably never seen him before, but that the detective did not think he had. He was merely making the usual next move according to the established rules of his profession. He did not think Napier was guilty of murder, or of having any knowledge of the murder, but proper tactics might determine what he really was dodging the law for, and in the suspicious lexicon of the detective business every man in the wide, wide world is guilty of something, if only you can find out what it is.

"Three days," Napier informed him cheerfully. "I am at the Bonham."

"What name do you say?"

"Napier. Julian Napier."

"That's a good name," the detective commented, with heavy sarcasm. "Napier. Sure. Well, we'll talk to you a little later and see why you don't want to tell us what you are doing so far from the Hotel Bonham at this hour of the night." He turned to one of the other detectives, who had not spoken. "Take him in the car down to headquarters and turn him over to Burlen," he ordered. "And ask the captain to have anybody picked up that is running 'round loose and can't explain what he's out for, and search 'em for knives. Then you better come back here."

"An officer certainly gets help quickly when he whistles for it in this town," Napier commented admiringly to his guard, as they took their seats in the tonneau of the police automobile, and the chauffeur headed it toward downtown.

"Yeah," the other agreed. "You run fast when you hear a whistle here on the West Side. Things can get to going mighty quick over in this part of town, and when you hear a whistle you think it might be you that was in a mess and wanted somebody to come a-running—and you arrive *pronto*. Say, I'm wise to what you was doing over here."

"Are you?"

"Sure. I knew the minute Smith threw that lamp into your face. Say, friend. Burlen—that's the chief of detectives, you know—is more

or less of a grouch. Me, I'm a good fellow—and reasonable. Tell me about it before we get to the station, and I'll be able to fix it, prob'ly."

"That's mighty good of you," Napier declared warmly. "But I'm going to take my chance with the chief."

"And I certainly had my work cut out for me to make Mr. Burlen shoo the other fellow out of the room and let me speak to him alone," he told Collector Lamb in the Federal Building at nine the next forenoon. "He wanted a witness to whatever slips I made, and I can't be sure, of course, that there wasn't one hidden, at that. But I didn't have to tell my affairs to the entire police force. You can usually trust a chief of police or the chief of detectives, but letting subordinates know your business is always risky. With the best intentions, some of them will make loose conversation. Well, as soon as we were alone, I showed him my badge, told him I was here on special smuggling work, and that was all there was to it. He was genial—and quite disappointed."

"Naturally."

"I didn't tell him I was following Puenta. I just said I was making some investigations over in that section. I didn't see that it would help them any. And I didn't think it advisable to say anything about the slip of paper I took out of his hand. I hate to hold out evidence on the police, but if we can't get somewhere following up that paper I'm pretty sure they couldn't, and they

would be practically certain to start asking questions of Chinamen—and then the fat would be in the fire."

A telegram was handed to the collector. "This is for you," he told Napier, and passed it over.

"Let's see the code book. It is a reply, I imagine, to a wire I sent Washington as soon as I got back to the hotel from the police station, asking for all the information they could dig up about an American officer named Glenn, located in China at the time I met the young lady who bowed to me. I'd like to be forearmed with all the facts I can get about him before I go out to look her up."

While the collector attended to routine matters, Napier worked out the cipher.

"Here it is," he said, after awhile, looking up from his labors. He read aloud his translation of the code:

> The only American officer named Glenn in China at the time you name was Captain George Walton Glenn. He was on an extended furlough from Philippine duty. Records show he resigned from service two years later, at age of forty-six. Reason given: Failing health. There seems to have been a vague but quite general impression that something was behind the resignation which his superiors preferred to overlook, but his record is officially clean. He returned to America and has since resided in

several cities. Most recent address: Cleveland. Will endeavor to secure additional information and will advise you promptly.

"It gives us the whole of his name, anyway," Napier commented. "Now we want to see if we can locate the gentleman in San Antonio. I'll tackle the hotels first, if you will let me use the 'phone."

"One of the fellows out in the other room can do it just as well as not, unless you have some reason for wanting to do it yourself," Lamb offered, and on Napier's agreement, stepped to the door and opened it. "Come in a minute, Powell, will you please? We want to locate Captain George Walton Glenn, formerly of the United States Army, at some hotel. See if you can do it, will you? Without giving him or anybody else any idea who you are."

"Want to talk to him if I get him?"

"No," Napier replied. "Give him some kind of explanation about his being the wrong Captain Glenn. All I want is to learn where he is living."

Powell withdrew and closed the door.

"You were speaking, when the telegram came," Lamb reminded Napier, "of the torn slip of paper you found in Puenta's hand."

Napier went into an inner pocket, took the fragment from a small card-case, and tossed it on the table before the collector. "What is it?" he asked.

"Part of a label from a five-tael opium tin," answered Lamb without hesitation.

"That is exactly what I thought when I first saw it. When Puenta dropped it on the floor and looked scared as he picked it up again and stuffed it away out of sight, I had no question that it was a dope label. That would have explained his fright perfectly. But it isn't."

"It isn't!" Lamb examined the paper more carefully. "It looks like one."

"The paper seems to be the same quality and color, but the ideographs on an opium tin label are printed—on a printing press. These look about the same, at first glance, but they are done with a brush. Besides, I never saw these particular characters on an opium tin."

"Do you read Chinese?"

"A little; not as much as I wish I did. I speak it well enough to make myself understood, although not to pass for a Chinaman; there are mighty few white men who can do that. I have a pretty good ideograph chart in my trunk, though, to help me out in a case like this."

He leaned over and pointed to the two characters.

"This first word, on the left," he said, "is pronounced 'tsai' in Mandarin Chinese. 'Tsai' happens to be a word that has quite a number of meanings. It means 'in,' 'within' and 'selectable.' It is also quite a common given name of a man."

"Cheerful language, where one word means all that," Lamb remarked.

"Before you get too critical of it on that account," grinned Napier, "suppose you recall a few of our own simple little words. 'Bow,' for instance; or 'fast.'"

"The boat cannot go fast because it has been made fast, so we will take a day off and fast," commented the collector appreciatively. "All right; I'd buy, if there were any place. English is a grand old tongue. And the other word?"

A tap at the door was followed by the entrance of Agent Powell. "I got him," he said. "He is at the Edgemont. Fourth place I called."

"No doubt about his being the right man?"

"They put him on the wire. We had a little cross-purpose conversation, during which I asked him if he had had the talk he was going to have with Minihan, and told him I was his friend Freeman. Then I suggested that his voice didn't sound right and asked if he was Captain Walter Glynn of Laredo, and he said he was George Walton Glenn. So I cussed somebody—indefinite—for getting me the wrong person, apologized fluently, and hung up."

"Where is the Edgemont?" Napier asked.

"About half a mile from here, just outside the business section. A family hotel."

"Respectable?"

"I have never heard otherwise."

"And comparatively inexpensive," Lamb added. "No transients, I believe, for less than a week."

Napier thanked Powell, who went out. "Is the Edgemont at all in the same general direction from the center as the Mexican quarter?" he asked.

"No. In almost the opposite direction."

"It is pretty evident, then, that if my message of last evening came from Miss Glenn, she wasn't at her hotel, but that doesn't prove she didn't send it from somewhere else, of course. However, guessing doesn't get us anywhere. One of two women sent me that message, and there is no use trying to figure out which it was without anything definite to go on. I've got to find them both."

"The fact that one of them knows Kalat ——"

Napier nodded. "Yes. It makes the Miss Glenn lead the one to follow up as quickly as possible, not neglecting, in the meantime, to keep my eyes open for Madame Frezzi." He considered briefly. "Do you know," he smiled, "I'm beginning to find it too crowded at the Bonham. I wouldn't be surprised, before I leave town, if I moved from there—provided I like the looks of the Edgemont and they have any vacant rooms. I'm going over and see the place with that to talk about, anyway."

He became more serious: "It might prove interesting to meet this ex-captain. Retired from the army at forty-six for ill health—and still alive

and well, so far as I could see, if he was the straight-shouldered old party who was in the automobile with the young lady, last evening. Didn't get back into the service during the late unpleasantness. Spent an extended furlough in China in preference to coming home to the States. With this Chinese angle to our problem, he is worth looking over."

The collector went back to the fragment of orange paper that lay on the desk between them.

"What is this other word?" he asked.

"It means 'lily.'"

"Then the two, together, would mean 'in a lily,' 'within a lily,' or 'a selectable lily'?"

"No, because this is the very bottom of the slip, and the words that preceded each of these are missing. There were characters, evidently, that came before the word 'tsai' and then, reading from the top of the next column, other words before you get to the 'lily.' No, the best we can be sure of is that 'lily' was the last word on the paper, and that somewhere back of it—about three or four words back, I should say from the size of the slip as it looked when it fell out of Puenta's pocket—was 'in,' 'within,' or 'selectable.'"

"'Selectable' is an elastic word," Lamb mused. "It could have a lot of synonyms, I should think." He looked up suddenly. "Would it call for too much stretch of the imagination to translate 'tsai' as 'gorgeous'? Couldn't this refer to The Gorgeous Lily?"

"Remembering what Puenta said about a diamond in a box," Napier agreed, "the idea certainly opens up some mighty interesting possibilities."

CHAPTER V

NAPIER returned the orange slip to his pocket. "Have you somebody here in your outfit who would be able to get at this Officer Guerra?" he asked.

"I think so. We get inside police stuff when it is necessary without going to the department officials."

"He said Puenta was friendly with some of the Chinese in the section back of where he was killed. We need to find out who they are. What Chinese resorts he hung out at, if any. What Chinese he had ever been seen with. Guerra or some other policeman in that section would know, but it wouldn't do for me to show any interest."

"I'll have one of the men tackle it right away."

"And we also ought to keep track of what progress the police make, if any."

"I'll get some lines out. What do you make out of that dying talk of Puenta's? Was he killed for stealing that paper, or for going to you with his message?"

"It could have been either, from the way he said it, and I was entirely unable to get him to answer a question."

"Or it could have been both."

"Yes, with the remote possibility that he didn't know, but was merely babbling his suspicions in a sort of delirium."

"But the murderer was after his paper."

"He thought so—and I think so, too. But when we remember that the slip was in the same pocket with his money, we have to admit a possibility that the man who killed him went through him for cash, that he got the label by accident when he found the roll, and that Puenta, snatching at it and recovering it, as he supposed—he never knew he only got a piece of it, poor devil!—could only think of that. I don't believe this is the true explanation, you understand; I am merely trying to consider all the possibilities."

"There is this to be said for the idea of a simple motive—robbery, or revenge over some old feud, or something like that," Lamb said. "If the murderer were after that label, why did he leave part of it in Puenta's hand? Why didn't he make sure he had it all?"

"Perhaps because he thought he *did* have it all. Perhaps because he heard me coming and didn't have another second of time. I must have been getting mighty close when he left Puenta. I moved into the alley slowly, and his footsteps were plainly to be heard at the other end. I take it he must have had to work fast—and that he was probably surprised when Puenta grabbed for the paper and didn't have time to do much thinking."

"Surprised?"

"The Mexican was stabbed in the back—struck from behind, without any warning, by some one who was probably lurking in the shadow of a doorway in the wall on the left. I observed there is such a door, right beside where the body lay. He fell forward on his face. The murderer, wasting not a second—perhaps he had a little lamp—turned him over and searched for whatever he wanted to find. The money or the label. He got both. Puenta realized what was happening and clutched for the paper. He got a corner of it, turned over, struggled to his knees, and fell forward again. Something—the sound of my footsteps, in all probability—sent the killer running toward the other end of the alley. It was the second thing that had disturbed his plans, the first being Puenta's surprising grab for the paper after the other thought he was dead."

Both men were silent for a moment, turning the thing over in their minds. Then Napier said:

"I should like to know who, if anybody, was watching Puenta down there in the Bonham when the slip fell to the floor."

"Could any one who was there have got to the place where the murder took place before you did?"

"Easily, by using an automobile. But I don't see how any such person could have known exactly where Puenta was going, unless he also knew about the message from the smiling lady

and where the Mexican was planning to take me. Even then, how could he have known the exact route?"

"That alley leads directly toward the Chinese quarter, only two or three blocks away."

"Yes; I have been studying a map. But I can't see, if Puenta was bound for that quarter, why he should have selected that narrow, dark and dangerous alley, when he could have reached any part of the Chinese section by wider and safer streets. It almost seems as if his destination could not have been far from the alley itself." He sighed. "Well, I don't know and I won't find out by sitting here theorizing. I have two immediate jobs cut out for me. Find Miss Glenn and ascertain, if I can, whether she sent for me last night, and get a line on young Señor Puenta's Chinese friends. I'll tackle the first, and you, if you will be so good, can get somebody hustling out to get a line on the second."

"I'll have somebody whom he won't suspect gossiping with Officer Guerra before he goes on duty again to-night."

"I'll 'phone you from time to time; it probably won't be much use trying to get me but if anything turns up that needs me in a hurry there might be a chance of catching me at the Bonham. The Edgemont, you say, is ——"

Lamb directed him.

As Napier turned into the modest entrance of the Hotel Edgemont, the gods of chance most surprisingly favored him. He met Miss Glenn,

dressed for the street, just coming through the door.

"This is fortunate," he exclaimed, with conventional politeness, as she murmured his name and gave him her hand. "I have wondered ever since I saw you last evening if I would be so lucky."

"I wasn't sure you recognized me," she smiled.

"I almost didn't. I'm afraid I must have stared like a gawk. It isn't really so many years since I saw you, but you don't look exactly as you did then, you know." His next sentence was not all empty compliment: "Those years have been very kind to you, Miss Glenn. If you still are Miss Glenn."

"I am." She laughed and looked frankly into his eyes; his thought at the moment was that he had shown very little sense there on the Bubbling Well Club veranda in being merely perfunctorily polite to a girl who was going to turn out to be as attractive as this one. "Those years haven't done a single thing to you, that I can see," she said. "You look exactly as you did then."

"I pull out the white hairs at the temples," he assured her. "With pincers. It hurts, but once in a while, when I meet young women who speak kindly, I realize it is worth the pain."

"Do you live here in San Antonio?"

"No. I'm a poor tourist, with no place to lay his head. At least, no place to lay his head where the roar and riot of this celebrating town doesn't

get into his ears." He looked into the shade of the small Edgemont lobby. "That explains my errand here. A friend told me they sell a very excellent variety of night's rest at this place."

"We live here," she said. "My father and I."

"As I recollect it, you mentioned that day we met—or Mrs. Morey did—that he was an army man."

"Yes. He is retired. We find the Edgemont very comfortable and quiet. I don't know what luck you will have; it is pretty well filled up now, I think."

"If I get in, perhaps I may hope to see something of you. We could probably find something to talk about; one doesn't meet old acquaintances every day whose experiences include the East. Seeing you last night sent my thoughts flying back there."

"One never completely gets over the East," she said. "I hope we do get a chance to talk about it." He was a little puzzled at her manner. It was as though she really wanted to see him again,—and didn't. She shifted the subject deftly and spoke of the carnival and of the parade that was scheduled for that afternoon, and he gathered she was on her way to have luncheon with some one and then see the procession from a vantage point. A Mrs. Jeffries, she said, whom she had known in Ohio. "Our home, you know, is in Cleveland," she added. "We are also tourists, in a way. Do you ever get to Cleveland?"

"Not often," he told her. "My home is in New York."

"Are you in the same business as when you were in Shanghai?"

It had been generally supposed, when he was in China, that he had some connection with an importing concern, and for the past seven years he actually had owned a small interest in a New York importing house, with his name on the door and no duties; a logical and satisfying explanation of many of his activities that had to do with foreign places and peoples. It was possible Mrs. Morey had told the girl, that day at the tea table, that he was with a firm of importers, and that she had remembered it. On the other hand, the message last night had said the sender of it "could help him in his business," which would hardly mean importing. Was there anything significant in this question?

"Yes," he replied.

She did not follow this up at all. Her next remark was inconsequential. They spoke for a moment or so of quite unimportant things—the city, the climate, the crowds, the odds and ends of subjects that comprise small talk for those who have no closer subjects in common. She showed no impatience at standing there, but he thought she would have been too well-bred to do so, even had she desired to get away. He ought not to hold her, yet he had made no headway regarding his mysterious message. He determined to refer once more to the previous evening, to give her

another opening if she wanted to take advantage of it.

"I can't tell you what pleasure it has given me to see you again," he said earnestly. "From the moment we met, last night, I hoped I would run into you somewhere. All the rest of the evening —I was going nowhere in particular; just watching the crowds—I kept my eyes open for you, hoping our autos would pass. But it was like searching for the needle in the haystack."

"Particularly as the haystack did not have the needle in it ten minutes after we saw you," she laughed. "We were on our way home then. My father was tired of the noise and confusion, and we didn't wait long after the parade."

"I hope I shall have an opportunity of meeting your father."

For the first time the girl did not look frankly into his eyes, and there was a peculiar and quite unexplainable note of embarrassment in her voice.

"Father does not go out much," she said. "He meets very few people. He—he is not at all well."

"I am sorry," Napier told her, with the right shade of regret. "It has been mighty good of you to stand and talk to me so long. I am afraid I have imposed on your good nature."

"It has been nice to see you," she said, with what he thought was a little more than perfunctory politeness. "Let us hope we shall meet again."

She smiled cordially and was gone. Three minutes later he learned that there were no suites or single rooms to be had at the Edgemont, either with or without baths, and that there wasn't the slightest chance there would be any until after the Fiesta.

He went over to the Bonham and ordered lunch in a dining-room that opened out of the main lobby.

He felt almost certain, now, that his message from the lady who smiled had not been sent by Ruth Glenn; it was highly improbable that she would not have mentioned it. This belief, even if it were proven true, did not eliminate her from his case, however; he had been anxious to find her before ever he received a message. He had been tempted, during their conversation, to mention Kalat Pasha in some indirect way, watching her face as she replied, but instantly dismissed the idea as foolish. At best, he could only learn that Kalat was in San Antonio and that she knew it, and any mention of the Turk, if her presence here had anything to do with his, would only serve to put Kalat on his guard. He had to remember, also, that Kalat, so far as he was aware, did not know him at all, and his attitude ought to be, if he and the Turk met, that neither did he know Kalat.

Harking back to their conversation, the whole idea that the girl could have anything whatever to do with a smuggling plot seemed almost impossible. Well-bred, well-groomed, self-reliant

American girls do not get themselves mixed up with Turks, Mexicans and Chinese in schemes to —— He pulled himself up short on this argument. Many most excellent people do not hold smuggling to be a serious crime, and he had to admit that his experiences in the department did not justify him in dismissing anybody as being outside the possibilities of participation in it. He himself could recall more than one well-bred, well-groomed, self-reliant young American —— "But not with eyes like that," he argued to himself. "Not with frank, honest brown eyes like that."

Brown, with little glints in them; eyes that laughed easily, looked as if they could be very sympathetic, and met one's gaze frankly and squarely—except when one discussed father. Perhaps when one discussed some other things, too; how did he know? Would they have been frank and straightforward if he had mentioned Kalat Pasha?

He thought he was trying to analyze the girl in his most professional manner. He would have contended, and made it a matter of serious debate with any one who differed, that the personal equation was not entering into his thoughts at all. But his conclusion was, notwithstanding that unexplained embarrassment when her father came into their conversation, that she wasn't that sort of girl. He hoped she would never find out that he had suspected she might have something to do with a gang of smugglers; she wouldn't be

able to understand it. Rather foolish to hope that, when perhaps he would never see her again. But he must see her again. Purely as a matter of business, of course. He couldn't let any lead in the case go unexplored, however improbable it might be. He wondered how soon.

A man who had been eating at a distant table passed out of the dining-room. At the entrance, stopping to get his hat, his eyes roamed over the room and rested upon Napier, who noticed him standing there but did not give him a second thought. He disappeared, and the treasury agent finished his lunch and sauntered out into the lobby.

The man stood at the clerk's desk, and, as Napier came out through the dining-room doorway, spoke a word to the clerk, who looked sharply at Napier and replied briefly, whereupon the man spoke again and moved away from the desk. It was perfectly obvious to Napier, who had seen the interchange of sentences, that the man had asked the clerk who he was.

He remembered, then, that the questioner had stood looking at him in the dining-room. He also recalled, vaguely, that he had seen the man before during his four days at the hotel. He wondered if it could have been on the previous evening.

He devoted a minute to the cutting and lighting of a cigar. Then he moved across the lobby to the news stand, selected a magazine, and strolled toward the elevator. Once in his room,

he tossed the magazine on a table and called the manager of the hotel on the telephone. With some difficulty he succeeded in getting that busy gentleman to come to the room at once.

He introduced himself, when the manager arrived, in his true capacity, and the news was received with entire absence of enthusiasm. A hotel manager may spend tens of thousands of dollars a year for publicity, but he prefers to choose its character; that sort of prominence which follows police and secret service activities he is quite willing to do without.

" In the first place, sir, I want to make a bargain with you," Napier said. " You give me a little assistance and consider this whole meeting as in confidence, promising to forget, for all practical purposes, who I am, and I will assure you that, if I can help it, there will be nothing made public that can annoy your house or its guests."

The hotel manager brightened. " Of course I will do anything I can," he said. "As to keeping your identity a secret, even if it wasn't a duty I owe the government, it is part of my business not to tell everything I know."

"As a matter of fact," Napier assured him, " I haven't any reason to think anything is likely to happen that will affect your place at all. But certain angles of a certain case—you had rather not know any more about it, I am sure, even if it were proper for me to tell you, which it isn't—seem to touch one or two people who live here.

Primarily, I want some information regarding a man who is in the lobby at this minute; at least he was when I came up, just now. As I came out of the dining-room, he asked the clerk at the desk who I was. The solemn-looking clerk with the round spectacles. That is, I think he did; one of the things I am going to ask you to do is to verify that. He is a man of fifty, perhaps, apparently a Mexican. Light complexion, gray, cropped mustache, thick gray hair. Deep pock-marks down both sides of his nose."

The manager nodded. "Mr. Villabosa," he said. "Salvador Villabosa. Did you say you were with the Department of Justice?"

"Treasury Department."

"Because I wouldn't have been surprised if you had been Department of Justice,—these Mexican refugees are all the time running up against that outfit,—but I am surprised that he has been doing anything to tangle himself up with your end of the government."

"Don't misunderstand me; I don't know that he has. Who is he, please, and how long has he been at the Bonham?"

"More than two months, this time," the manager said. "And he has been here before. A number of times. As to who he is —— A refugee. That is about all I can tell you. Not an extremely rich man, I should say, but fairly well-to-do. Well-to-do enough to live here and always pay his bill on time, anyway."

"You use the word 'refugee' to mean any

Mexican who has been forced to leave Mexico since the troubles began six or seven years ago, don't you?"

"That is the usual meaning in San Antonio, yes. This man began to come here some time ago—several years, I guess. He has lived here quite a bit, off and on."

"From what part of Mexico?"

The manager shrugged. "I haven't the slightest idea. I don't even know that he is a refugee. He merely acts like one. We have always taken it for granted."

"Acts like one? How?"

"He isn't in business in this city, so far as I know. He does not seem to have any particular means of support. He hangs around the hotel, meets other Mexicans from time to time, just seems to be waiting for something to turn up. Those are the usual refugee symptoms."

"Thank you," Napier said. "Now, I would like you to make some guarded inquiries and let me know, if you will, what you find out. Are the clerks who were in charge at the desk from, say, eleven o'clock to a little past midnight, last night, out of bed yet?"

"Yes. There is a shift of clerks at midnight, when two go off duty and one comes on, and ordinarily the after-midnight man wouldn't be where he could be got at now, but on account of the rush of business we are all working overtime this week. I can find all three."

"Good. Will you ask them if they know

whether this man Villabosa was in the lobby of the hotel last night at or soon after eleven? And, if it is possible for them to say, how long he was there?"

The manager shook his head. "Even if he were there all the evening, it would be mighty unlikely they would remember it," he doubted. "Our lobby was a pretty crowded place, last night."

"I know it; I was there. But it is quite important." The manager turned to go. "And make sure, please, what Villabosa asked the round-spectacled clerk as I came out of the dining-room."

The manager was back in twenty minutes.

"You were right about his talk with the clerk," he said, at once. "Villabosa said your face was familiar and asked him your name. When the clerk gave it, Villabosa said he guessed you must look like somebody else. And as to last night, it's a funny thing, but for all the mob there was swarming through that lobby, two of those clerks are so sure Villabosa was here that they are willing to swear to it."

"At what hour? And how do they place it?"

"One of them places it by a matter that happens to concern you. Did a young man, probably a Mexican, find you about half-past eleven?"

"Yes. When I came in after the parade."

"He had asked the clerk if you were stopping here, and the clerk misunderstood him and

thought he wanted to know if you were in the house, so he turned to the telephone switchboard and said, ' See if Mr. Napier is in Room 697.' The girl reported you were not, and the young Mexican said he would wait and stayed right there, close to the desk. The clerk continued to notice him, because he didn't seem to want to move, and he was more or less under the guests' feet. The whole matter is one easily remembered, because my assistant manager was in hearing, and he called the clerk down, afterward, for shouting your room number that way. We are careful who we give the numbers of guests' rooms to, of course."

" What did Villabosa have to do with this? "

" It seems he was standing at the desk when the young Mexican came up, and the clerk noticed his sort of peculiar manner. He turned his back very squarely to the young man and moved off in such a way that the clerk thought he didn't want the chap who was looking for you to see him. The clerk's impression at the moment was that Villabosa knew the fellow and was dodging a touch, or something like that."

"And afterward? After I had come? "

" It was really an odd thing about that. Out of all the guests in this house, I don't suppose those fellows could tell you what a single other man did between half-past eleven and one o'clock, but three men are perfectly positive about Villabosa. One of the clerks who went off at midnight, the one who came on at midnight and the

night cashier—every one of them happens to have talked with him about something or other that impressed the conversation on his mind, and they are sure he was in the lobby all the time. The last time anybody saw him was at just six minutes to one, and the clerk remembers it because Villabosa was comparing his watch with our clock and argued that we were a minute wrong. The clerks think he disappeared after that. He probably went to his room."

CHAPTER VI

"I'm afraid I can't give you much information. Salvador Villabosa is more or less of a mystery."

The speaker was an agent of the Department of Justice, whose duties for several years had made him familiar with refugee Mexicans, especially if at any time they had been suspected of connection with the various *juntas* that had been born, flourished, decayed, and died a natural death or been officially executed in San Antonio. Napier sat in the agent's office, where he had arrived after a circuitous and erratic journey. That Villabosa, or some friend of Villabosa, might have seen fit to follow him, was not at all improbable—in fact, he thought the odds were in favor of it—but he was skilful in shaking off pursuers, the streets were very crowded, and he was certain, if any one had started out to trail his footsteps, that the trailer had long since been lost.

"We have had our eyes on him, of course," the D. J. man said. "The same as we have had them on a hundred others of whom we have never been able to find out much. I have no doubt there is some plot to revolutionize the governmen of his own, his native land, that he would

like to see succeed. He would hardly be a refugee if there wasn't. But we don't know it. He seems to have some income, and he apparently behaves himself. Lately, he hasn't come to our attention at all, but at one time we watched him a good deal because he had some bum friends and we have to go on the principle, you know, that evil associations corrupt good manners. That crowd he used to seem to know pretty well has gone away from here, now. Things happened to most of them. They were Pancho Villa men."

"He wasn't active in the group, you say?"

"Never that we could find out. He merely kept bad company. There hasn't been much of a Villa group here since the Pershing expedition, and such friends as Villabosa has now—he isn't much of a mixer—aren't connected with any *junta* at all, so far as we know. He seems to be a quiet, orderly, still-waters-run-deep sort of old fellow, who mostly minds his own business. What are you after him for? Has he been dodging duties?"

"That is what I am trying to find out. Tell me some more about those old friends he used to have. That Villa group."

"They were mostly men from Northern Mexico—Coahuila and Chihuahua—who had got tangled up in one or the other of the ructions after old Don Porfirio quit, and had found this side of the border safer than the other. Bad *hombres*. We got some of them at the time of

the Plan of San Diego uprising, and some others of them went back when Pancho was going strong, and disappeared. But, as I say, we never were sure this Villabosa had anything to do with their political plots."

"Would you think it likely he might have a present acquaintance with hard characters across the Rio Grande—bandits, perhaps?"

"More than likely. Any man who knew that Villa gang he used to associate with wouldn't be fussy about his acquaintances. And he isn't the real thing; you don't see any of these rich old refugees of good Mexican family associating with him. I suppose what you are getting at is that he might be a member of a gang of smugglers. That is quite out of my line, of course, and I don't know a thing about it, but if you want to know whether I think he is too good to have connections of that sort, I don't."

Less than an hour afterward, an unobtrusive, wiry young man named Gordon, invited to assist on the recommendation of Collector Lamb, took upon himself the task of following Señor Villabosa until further orders, with a view to adding to the Treasury Department's knowledge of him and his friends. When Gordon had listened to Napier's description of the man and set out for the Bonham to begin his labors, the collector smiled across his desk at the special agent.

"Making progress, are you?" he commented. "Well, we have made a little, too. Our man saw Policeman Guerra, and Guerra was glad to

talk. The late Angel Puenta's Chinese friends, so far as he had observed, all seem to be connected more or less with that big restaurant keeper I told you about the other day—Charles Toy."

He consulted a slip of paper on his desk.

"Wang Ting is one of the Chinks Guerra has seen him with, and Wang Ting is a servant of some sort at Toy's house. And he has seen Puenta coming and going from Toy's place—several times. He had the impression, always, that Puenta was a sort of errand boy for Toy. Having some Mexican blood himself, he was scornful of a Mexican who would run errands for Chinamen, but he figured that Puenta, being a dope fiend, was keeping close to a source of supply."

"By 'Toy's place,' do you mean the restaurant?"

"No. Guerra doesn't know anything about the restaurant; that isn't on his beat or anywhere near it. It was Toy's house where he saw Puenta. It is a large house, one of the elaborate buildings over in that section. In the old days it used to be called 'Harmony Palace'; made a specialty of its music. It sets in the middle of a quarter of a block of land—here, I'll show you." The collector indicated the location on his map.

"Toy has a family, has he?"

"He has a considerable household, I gather. Whether the other Chinese who live there are his relatives, or business associates, or fellow members of a society, I don't know, and I don't

suppose any other American does. Rents are nothing like what they used to be over in that section, of course, but, even so, Mr. Charles Toy must be a prosperous person to be able to afford a house like that. Well, Guerra saw Puenta coming and going there several times, and he saw Puenta meet and talk to this Wang Ting I mentioned, who is some sort of servant or henchman of Toy's. But principally, he has the fellow placed as an acquaintance of Joe Fong's, and Joe Fong is one of Toy's right-hand men."

"At his place of business?"

"Yes. This Fong seems to be an interesting character. If there is any connection between Mexicans and Chinese in a smuggling scheme, he might prove to be more or less of a go-between. At least, his blood fits him to be. He is a half-breed. Half Chinese and half *pelado* Mexican. There's a combination for you! Guerra says his name is supposed to be José, and that the Mexicans say his mother tried to have him raised Christian, but the Lord only knows whether he thinks of himself as Chinese or Mexican. Some days he acts like one and some days like the other."

"And probably with the worst attributes of both," Napier commented.

"Well, that's the story. The only other name I have here is the name of Toy's manager, or something of that sort, at the restaurant—the man who always seems to be in charge when Toy isn't there. He also lives at 'Harmony Palace,'

but Guerra never saw Puenta in his company. Our man made a memoranda of the name only on general principles. It is Tung Sheng."

Napier had made note of the names as the collector read them. Now he put away his little memorandum book and remarked:

"They could be a company of most excellent merchants, and they could be a fine gang of crooks, with opium-running and other activities on the side—and I don't know but one way to find out. I am going to become a chop-suey hound. Beginning at dinner time to-night."

He consulted his watch. "And in the meantime I will go back to the hotel, order my phlegmatic chauffeur, and get out into the crowded highways and byways to keep my eyes open for Kalat Pasha. And also for a beautiful Italian lady who smiled and sent a message."

"Did she? You must have learned that since you saw me this forenoon. How do you know?"

"I don't. It is merely my best guess at this minute. I've seen the other one, and I am convinced she didn't."

CHAPTER VII

It was not yet dark, that evening, when Napier, with a magazine in his hand, leisurely ascended the stairs that led to the Oriental restaurant of Charles Toy and surveyed the big dining-room from the entrance door.

It was a well-furnished, prosperous looking place, with the customary Chinese decorations, the inevitable odors, and many tables for two and four people. Off at one side was a doorway that a party of diners was just passing through, probably to private rooms. The place was fairly well filled, but not crowded; it was hardly late enough for it to be doing its heavy business; Napier thought that in ordinary weeks it would have been nearly empty at this hour, but during Fiesta time any restaurant of whatever character is bound to have an unusual patronage.

Close at hand, in a cashier's cage, sat a tall, stout, elderly Chinaman with round spectacles and an air of bland benevolence. This, he thought, would probably be Toy. As he stood there, sizing up the place and seeming only to look for a table that he liked, another Chinaman came from somewhere rearward and also entered the cage, where he conversed with Toy. He was in early middle age, intelligent looking and quick

in his movements. From his manner of authority and the freedom with which he addressed the old, benevolent one, Napier guessed this to be the manager, Tung Sheng.

He observed, with gratification, a large table far back at the rear of the room, a table with eight stools, two of which were occupied by Chinamen who were being served with steaming bowls of rice. In the center of the table was a great platter of boiled meat of some sort, from which the pair were making ready to help themselves. He had hoped to find something like this during an off hour. Charles Toy evidently served Chinese regular boarders, or, at least, served a meal for his compatriots more in accordance with their likes than the dishes on his regular bill-of-fare.

By the size of the platter in the middle of the table Napier thought more diners were momentarily expected to join the two already present, who, however, were not waiting or otherwise standing upon ceremony, but were fishing bits of meat out of the common dish with deft chopsticks and alternating them with gulped mouthfuls of rice, pushed swiftly between their lips from the edges of their bowls.

It would be from that table that gossip might be overheard, if anywhere in the room. He sauntered toward it, studying the lights above the tables. It was quite clear to any one observing him that he proposed eating in leisurely fashion and reading as he ate, and that he sought

a place where the light would fall conveniently. A little table that filled these specifications stood at the side of the room, not ten feet from the big one where the Chinese were. He took a seat, studied the bill-of-fare, ordered chow mien, which, needing to be cooked to order, takes considerable time, and opened his magazine.

Two more Chinese came in after a few moments, and just behind them another and another. They dropped into the places at the large table and fell to eating their rice and meat. A waiter brought a tureen of soup, of which each took a share in a flat-bottomed ladle that thereafter rested at the side of his rice bowl. They all drank many little cups of tea.

After the first edge of their hunger had passed, they talked, not loudly. Napier could hear some of the things they said, especially when some diner, feeling impelled to make a remark when his mouth was full of rice, raised his voice. They all spoke the Cantonese dialect.

What they said was excessively unimportant. Napier, who made his eyes follow the print before him and did not forget to turn a page occasionally, made out something about a man—a grocer, he gathered—who had passed through a painful experience with some unreasonable official who had declared he did not screen his vegetables sufficiently; that another person had lost eighty dollars, American gold, at fan-tan; that somebody else had received word from China that his grandfather had gone to join

his honorable ancestors. Two more Chinese came in, and the table was filled. One of the latest arrivals was a fat man who seemed to have a reputation as a humorist. At his comments on men and things the table laughed with quiet immoderation.

The old man in the cashier's cage looked at the clock, got up out of his chair, and called one of his men, who took his place at the desk. The manager came from somewhere with his hat in his hand. Old Toy took his hat down from a hook, and he and the manager went out together.

" Never have I seen the old sire and Tung both leave this place in the evening at the same time," one of the Chinese at the boarders' table remarked. " Old sire " was the literal translation of the phrase; it was the common Cantonese appellation for one in authority, the boss. A more correct translation, as regards its meaning, would be " great one."

"And with all these festival crowds," another Chinaman added idly. " Last night, because of the sickness of Look Sing, I waited on tables here. It was so crowded, after the parade, that people in numbers waited their turn. Not until one o'clock in the morning did the last customer depart. And all that time, from seven to one, they were *both* here. It must be something important that makes them leave now. But perhaps they will come back before the crowds get large."

"There must be a meeting at the great house," the first speaker guessed. "It would be an important meeting to take both."

"Perhaps a ship arrives," the fat, humorous person chuckled. "With bitter ballast." The others laughed appreciatively. Napier turned another page, tried to look absorbed in his magazine, and strained his ears. Here was a phrase with significance. "A ship with bitter ballast." Often had he heard it in China, where daring men risk their junks, their cargoes and their liberty to evade the salt duties. A smuggling ship.

A soft voice, a new one, replied to the fat man's pleasantry. For all its softness, there was in it a note of cold menace:

"He who speaks too much with his voice sometimes comes suddenly to a day when his voice is hushed."

Out of the corner of his eye Napier saw that he who had uttered this obvious reproof and warning, who had come up from kitchenward to the rear of the boarders' table just in time to hear the fat man's pleasantry, was a young man with the complexion and cheekbones of a Mexican *pelado,* or low-class Indian, and the slant eyes of a Mongolian. The combination was repellant and sinister. He had no difficulty in identifying him, from Lamb's description, as that half-caste member of Toy's staff of right-hand men who was called Joe Fong.

The humorist no longer smiled, and the others ceased their cackling as though an extinguisher

had been jammed down on their merriment and ate hurriedly, their faces wooden.

"It was only a jest," the fat man protested. His voice was apologetic, his whole attitude cringing. "There is no one here who is not one of us, except the barbarians, who do not understand our tongue."

"Jests can be foolish—and dangerous—even when there is nobody to hear," Joe Fong declared. And added, sententiously: "There is wisdom in a short tongue, but the tongue that is too long becomes silent."

He turned and disappeared noiselessly, leaving a hushed and uncomfortable double quartette of Chinamen.

Napier ate his chow mien, drank his tea, and left the restaurant. Until then, he had rather planned to spend the evening in the automobile, still searching for the face of Kalat, but the conversation he had overheard decided him to devote at least a portion of the coming hours to a survey of the residence of Charles Toy. He took it for granted the man who had referred to a meeting at "the great house" had meant the ornate establishment across the creek formerly known as "Harmony Palace."

When he had come to the vicinity of the place, by a roundabout way, it was half-past nine o'clock. There was no moon, and except where the arcs burned on the street corners or here and there a beam of light streamed out from an uncurtained window, the section was very dark.

He came down a cross street to the side of the three big lots, in the center of which the house sat, and saw with satisfaction that the deep shade of several mulberry trees just off the sidewalk would afford him concealment.

The big, many-roomed mansion, two storied and architecturally ambitious—he had no doubt some designer had been given a free hand at the time of its building, and that the interior would prove to be even more ornate than its outside—gave little sign of being occupied. A glimmer of light showed in one upstairs window. Downstairs no lights showed, probably due to the presence of heavy curtains and window draperies. In striking contrast to this interior darkness was a garish brilliancy of light outside the house, in front, where over the door a cluster of incandescents of high candle-power made the walk that led up from the sidewalk a path in which one's personality would not be hidden from any eye looking out from a darkened room or hall.

Expected guests, Napier judged, would enter by that front door, and those in the house would know whether or not they were the right ones before ever they came within reaching distance of the doorbell.

The neighborhood was still. Somewhere, a block or two away, a player with Oriental ideas of music was extorting weird noises from a Chinese fiddle. At a distance in the other direction, in strange opposition, a phonograph was shrilling the monotonous syncopation of a most up-to-date

jazz waltz. Except for these, there were almost no sounds.

Napier, from his place of concealment behind a mulberry tree, wondered if the gossiping Chinaman in the restaurant had really guessed right—if there really were any meeting or conference in progress here in the great house. If so, had the participants all arrived? This was not important; he could study them as they departed. He leaned his shoulder against the tree trunk, making himself comfortable for a wait.

An automobile came through the street from the direction of town, and stopped with a squeal of brakes at the walk leading up to the house. From the tonneau, alone, alighted Ruth Glenn.

She moved briskly toward the house as though she were quite familiar with her surroundings. She stood a moment on the gallery. The door opened. Napier could not see who stood inside, or hear what she said. She stepped in and the door closed.

At that instant Napier became conscious of a sound, a movement, a presence behind him. He spun around to face it, not quickly enough. A heavy blow crashed against his skull, over the ear, and he pitched forward into a blackness that was spattered with whirling suns.

She stood a moment on the gallery. The door opened.
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CHAPTER VIII

NAPIER struggled back to consciousness and raised his head dizzily. "Steady," a voice whispered. "You're all right. Take it easy."

"What——"

"Softly. Better not talk. Sound carries on a night like this, and we are pretty close to the house. Better not try to sit up for a minute, till your head clears a bit."

His head ached and throbbed, and he tried to recall exactly how he came to be unconscious. He remembered, in a minute, and opened his eyes to demand, with cautiously lowered voice:

"Who are you?"

"Gordon," the man on his knees beside him said. "I was following your old friend Villabosa, you know."

Napier's mind cleared rapidly, and he sat up. An outstretched hand, on the side away from the wiry young treasury agent, encountered a still object that was plainly part of the prostrate figure of a man. "What—— Who is that?" he asked.

"The said Villabosa," Gordon chuckled. "I don't know exactly what shape he is in—I went to work on you first. We'll take a look-see as soon as you are sure you are quite all right. I

would expect him to take a little longer sleep than you, anyway, because all he hit you with was a blackjack, and I had to wallop him over the side of the head with a pistol."

Napier rested his hand on the Mexican's breast; it was rising and falling regularly. His fingers came in contact with metal.

"Handcuffed."

"Thought I wouldn't take any chances while I was fussing with you. I guess maybe we'd better gag him when he comes to. There's no sense letting him holler in this neighborhood."

"I'd like to know what happened, if there's time to tell it. I'm getting clear-headed enough now." Napier delicately patted a bump of increasing size an inch and a half above his right ear. "It doesn't seem to have broken the skin, but it surely hurts."

"There's mighty little to tell. He tried to follow you, late this afternoon, when you left the hotel—and lost you inside of ten minutes. He went back to the Bonham and stayed there until after dinner. A little while ago he started for here. You crossed the street ahead of him about two blocks back, and he slowed up and took his time trailing you. Perhaps I ought to have tried to warn you, but ——"

"But you thought I probably was able to take care of myself," Napier supplied, when Gordon hesitated.

"I would have warned you when he sneaked up in back of you if I had known he was so close.

But I was a long way off when you disappeared among these trees, and when he came up behind you, with me behind him, I didn't know that you hadn't gone beyond the trees and up to the back of the house, or somewhere. I didn't know you were right here until he rose up and lammed you. He turned you over in a hurry and started to go through your pockets."

"And you rose up and lammed him. Thanks. I'll do the same for you some time. What had we better do with him?"

"That's up to you. I don't know all the details of the case, but I shouldn't suppose we ought to let him loose after this."

"No, it wouldn't do. If he were headed for this house, and it looks pretty certain that he was, he would tell them the first chance he got that I was watching it."

"We can take him down to headquarters, temporarily, and then consider what to do with him afterward. My idea is that when he begins to take notice we had better see he is fixed so he can't do any shouting, and then one of us can stay here with him, nice and quiet and out of sight, while the other goes and gets an automobile. Perhaps I'd better be the one to go; I know the town better than you do."

Villabosa sighed and moved.

"*Que diable!*" he muttered, and Napier's hands went to his throat, while he commanded, "Keep quiet!"

Gordon wadded a handkerchief, forced it be-

tween Villabosa's teeth, and fastened it with another handkerchief before the dazed prisoner was fairly aware of what was happening.

"I'll slip away and come back with a closed car," he whispered to Napier. "If the police happen to see us taking him to it, or happen to discover you here—which is unlikely—I don't suppose there is anything to do but identify ourselves and ask them to run away and play, but I hope we won't have to do that."

"If any policemen pass while you are gone, I shan't do anything to attract their attention—and neither will he."

Gordon rose to his feet. It suddenly occurred to Napier that he had not looked toward the big house since he drifted back to consciousness. He turned quickly. The automobile that had brought Ruth Glenn was gone.

"How many people left the house while I was down and out?" he asked. "And who?"

"Nobody I ever saw before. To tell the truth, I was so busy I didn't notice very particularly. A woman and a man went away in the auto. Perhaps it was a woman and two men."

"Can you describe them?"

"No. I didn't hear them come out of the house. I happened to hear voices and looked up, and they were all right at the car, getting in. I saw a woman and two men, but one of the men may have been the chauffeur, for all I know. He might have got out of the car for something.

I think one of the men was sort of stout and Spanish looking, but I'm not sure. I'm mighty sorry I didn't notice more, but just at that minute I was trying to find out whether you had been badly hurt ——"

"A man can't do everything at once. You could hear their voices, you say?"

"But not a word they said. I don't even know whether they were speaking English."

Villabosa moved uneasily, discovered the handcuffs and sought to give voice to some emotion.

"You lie still, old sport," Gordon told him, "and when I come back I'll take you where we can get that little cut in your head fixed up."

"In the meantime," Napier growled, with his hand on his own throbbing bruise, "if you get to threshing around and trying to attract attention, I'll be obliged to give you another cut to go with that one—on the other side."

Villabosa relapsed into watchful waiting, and Gordon silently departed.

Napier, crouching beside the Mexican, fixed his eyes on the house. No one entered or left. No sound came from it. Its contrast of exterior light and interior darkness was unchanged.

Two Chinamen crossed the street at the corner above, chattering in shrill singsong, and passed on about their business. The muffled click of a walking horse's hoofs was followed by the appearance of a mounted policeman, who rode by casually, his body slouched, his hands on the pommel of his saddle. The officer had been gone

five minutes when Gordon stepped out of a covered automobile and hurried to Napier's side.

"All right? Anything happen? I had good luck—called a garage and found this driver in. I've had him before. Perfectly reliable and close-mouthed. He came a-runnin'."

" I can't very well go back with you," Napier told him. " I want to see who comes out of the house; nobody has since you've been gone. Suppose you take him down to the Federal Building and let me join you there a little later. Or you could have him locked up, if I don't get there for some time, and we can question him in the morning."

" I haven't anything to do but stick to him, and he hasn't a thing in the world on hand but hang around with me. I'll do a little first-aid on his head, or get in a doctor if he seems to need a stitch or two, and then we'll make ourselves comfortable and wait. It isn't late—hardly ten o'clock."

They turned to Villabosa and bade him get up and go with Gordon. Resistance was useless; protest impossible. He went with docility.

The purr of their motor had hardly faded when another automobile came through the street on which the big house faced and drew up in front of it. Its chauffeur sounded his horn with that impatient emphasis that is almost the trademark of taxi-drivers who prefer to avoid the steps necessary to walk to a door and announce that the carriage waits. Immediately Charles Toy

and Tung Sheng, his manager, came out of the house, climbed into the car, and were driven away—back to the restaurant, no doubt, in time for the evening's greatest rush.

The cluster of electric lights under the veranda roof went dark. Whatever meeting had been held at the "great house" that evening was obviously adjourned.

Napier waited a little, to see if any other activities developed. For all he could see or hear, the place might have been unoccupied. He slipped out of the shadow of the mulberry trees, finally, and set out in the direction of town.

Somewhere ahead of him, a player was torturing a Chinese fiddle. He had noticed it about the time of his arrival; it occurred to him, now, that he had been subconsciously aware of the monotonous repetitions of the musician most of the time since.

For two blocks his mind had been filled with the complications that the evening's adventures had added to his problem, but now, when he was within perhaps a block of the player, something about the weird scrapings and squealings made an insistent demand upon his powers of recollection. Where, among all the Chinese fiddling he had heard, had something happened that this one was recalling?

Three shrill, ascending notes—discordant and barbaric to Western ears—a shrieking run, and then three shrill, sharp, descending notes. It came to Napier what it was that hammered at his

memory. He knew this tune; it was one of the two or three Chinese airs he had ever been able to distinguish definitely from the others. Old Kwong Li played it, over and over, when he and Kwong were friends in San Francisco, three years ago. Kwong had solemnly assured him that there were only a few musicians who could play it exactly as it should be played. Its name was "The Running Brook at Springtime and the Little Bird in the Tree." For all his headache he grinned a little as he remembered how he had always wanted to ask Kwong whether the three sharp, descending notes were supposed to represent the running brook hitting a waterfall or the little bird falling out of the tree. Of course he never had, for that would have hurt Kwong's feelings. Kwong took it for granted he knew. Kwong thought he appreciated Chinese music.

The player was back at the beginning of the tune now, starting all over again. He must be as fond of it as old Kwong.

Napier saw, a half block before him, a little, one-storied grocery. It had not yet closed for the night; there was a light inside and at least one customer. The narrow front gallery was in darkness except for such rays as straggled through the front window, and the fiddler was seated out there. Napier thought amusedly that the man was having an enthusiastic evening all by himself. Neighboring Chinese had probably not even noticed him, but in a Caucasian section

such harrowing sounds as he was producing would have long since busied every telephone in the vicinity with frantic calls for the police.

The customer came out through the door, chanting a Cantonese farewell to the grocer inside. He stepped down from the gallery and then turned and bowed deferentially in the direction of the hidden musician.

"Good night, Kwong Li," he called respectfully. "May no demons disturb your dreams."

The fiddler stopped. "Good night, honorable friend," he replied. "May you awaken, refreshed, to the best of rice."

All requirements of etiquette now being perfectly fulfilled, the one-string fiddle resumed the tune on the next note to that on which it had been interrupted.

The customer had vanished, and the grocer had gone to the rear of the store when Napier paused in the shadows close to the gallery and called softly, in his best Mandarin:

"Kwong Li! Is it not the honorable and venerable Kwong Li?"

The bow bit off the sound in the middle of a dispirited wail, and the old Chinaman shuffled quickly forward. Napier stepped a little into the light, and the other bowed with sedate dignity, while from his lips fell a sentence out of the Analects of Confucius:

"'Is it not a charming thing when a friend comes from afar?'"

CHAPTER IX

"At a distance I heard the music," Napier said gravely, " and I thought, ' Can it be possible that in this city there is one who can play of The Running Brook at Springtime and the Little Bird in the Tree like Kwong Li, who is in San Francisco? ' "

Kwong inclined his head to the compliment. " Will you not honor me by entering the humble abode of my nephew? " he asked ceremoniously. And added, after Napier, with regard for the conventions, had murmured, " It would be presumptuous for me to precede you," and then, on the old man's insistence, had passed first through the door. " It is a poor place. A very poor place."

It was, but Napier, who knew Kwong would have spoken the same words if he had been receiving him in a palace, replied with the proper sentiment:

" It is a most excellent place. A very delightful place."

A young Chinaman appeared in the door to a living room behind the store, surveying this most unusual guest as impassively as though tall Americans who spoke Chinese were quite within his common daily experience.

"Kwong Yet, we are honored by the visit of my great friend Nah Poo," old Kwong told him, "Nah Poo" being the nearest he had ever been able to come to the pronunciation of Napier. "I have told you the story of how I was accused of being concerned in smuggling with which I had nothing to do, and that I should surely have been punished, being entangled in evidence that I could not prove false, but for an official who sought to protect the innocent as well as punish the guilty. Nah Poo is he who saved your father's brother."

"The nephew of Kwong Li is your servant for your kindness to the elder one of his clan," murmured Kwong Yet. "This is your home, and all the poor things in it are your property."

Kwong Li, since coming into his nephew's hearing, had dropped the Mandarin dialect and spoken in Cantonese, from which Napier judged the younger man, perhaps American born, did not possess the education of his uncle. He also dropped into Cantonese in his courteous reply.

Old Kwong urged him to be seated and accept a pipe. "A tobacco pipe," he smiled. "I know you do not use opium, and you know already, my friend, that neither do I. Nor does Kwong Yet."

"A plain pipe and a mere pinch of tobacco," Napier deprecated. Clearly Kwong Li proposed to make this a ceremonial visit, and he could not let his impatience to rejoin Gordon and his prisoner show in any slighting of the cus-

tomary forms unless he wished Kwong to take offense. Kwong Yet got pipes, filled them, and brought matches. Then, perhaps in obedience to some sign from his uncle, he mentioned apologetically that he had a small errand which would take him out of the store for a while. He would close it for the night, and his honorable elders would not be disturbed. He bowed deeply and went away.

In silence Napier and his wrinkled host smoked slowly. Not until half a pipeful had been burned did either speak. Then Napier said:

"It is strange to find you a thousand miles from San Francisco."

"Only four days have I been here," Kwong replied. "I came to visit the son of my brother. Some day I shall return, I think, but it is not important. I have sold my business."

"So good a merchant as you has surely been successful."

"I have saved enough. I need not call on friends for alms, if illness comes, or fear that there is not enough to send my bones to rest beside those of the honorable ancestors," the old man replied complacently. "Not for many years had I seen my nephew. His business here is not a great one, but better men have done worse than he is doing."

Another interval of smoking, and Napier thought the time had arrived when he might properly introduce the subject that was foremost in his thoughts.

"I think, Kwong Li," he said, "that I am going to ask of you a very great favor."

The Chinaman inhaled a deep puff of smoke before he replied. He knew Napier's occupation.

"No favor for you would be great," he said then. "I am old, but my mind is still as clear as when I was young. I do not forget. There was a day when I said to you that if ever you should come to me and demand payment for the debt I owed you, that day the payment should be made. My memory tells me that I struck palms of hands with you when I said it. What do you require of me, Nah Poo?"

"No," Napier said. "It is not a demand. It is what I said—a favor. If it is a very dangerous thing for you to accede to it, I do not hold you to the promise. I am not asking payment; the slight thing I was able to do for you was not in hope of reward. You will remember I did not even know you and your excellent qualities when I did it. Our friendship came afterward."

"That is true," Kwong said, and waited.

"No Chinese in this city know my business," Napier remarked.

"None shall, from me or my nephew," the old man assured him.

"Yet my business has to do with Chinese. There are those here who deal with 'cargoes of bitter ballast.'"

"As everywhere."

"Perhaps they are friends of yours. They might even be connections of your clan."

"Not that I know. I have not heard, since I came here, who are those who trade in—I suppose it is opium."

"Yes."

"Kwong Yet may know. Undoubtedly he does know. He has been here some time."

"The favor that I mention with hesitation has to do with the doings of certain men. Hear me, Kwong Li. If, when I name them to you, or after you have talked with your nephew, it appears that they are of your tong, or of any clan which it would be dishonorable for you to injure, my request is withdrawn, and this talk becomes a thing to be forgotten. If not ——"

His smoking host did not hesitate to show relief. "'The consideration of a friend for the honor of a friend is a shining thing, like moonbeams upon a placid river,'" he quoted. "You make it very easy."

"One of these men," Napier told him, without more hesitation, "is called Charles Toy. He has a big restaurant."

"What is his real name?"

"I do not know."

Kwong shook his head. "So far as I am aware, I never heard of him."

"His manager—who lives with him in a large house three streets away from here—is Tung Sheng."

"I have not heard that name, either."

"And there is another, but I hear he is a menial, called Wang Ting."

Still no recognition.

" The fourth—and these are all the names I know as yet—is one Joe Fong. He is half Chinese, half Mexican."

The old man's heavy-lidded eyes showed interest. " There are not so many who are of that mixture," he said. " Can you describe him? "

Napier did so. The result was quite surprising.

Kwong Li made fluent remarks, made them coldly, dispassionately, without raising his voice, but positively. They had to do with Joe Fong, with the characteristics and present abode of his ancestors to the fiftieth generation, with the morals of his mother and the occupation of his sisters and the appropriate fate of his male children, if he should ever have any. Kwong was very thorough. When he had finished for lack of further expletive—and it was some time, because there are many things a Chinaman can say in derogation of a person, and several ways of saying each one, and the old man went with detail into most of them—Napier merely remarked: " I see he is known to you."

" Since noon to-day. He came past this place when I was sitting outside in the shade, making music with the fiddle. He does not know how to talk to his elders; his ears are the ears of a fool; and his sense is as the sense in the flat head of a snake."

Napier waited in silence.

"I am making music, and he passes by. And calls to me, 'What is the good of all this disturbance when there is no Chinese theater in town where you can get work?' And then, as naturally I did not deign even to notice him, he cried, 'But if there was, you would hardly play in it. As big a town as this would have a theater with a *good* orchestra.' I was playing, Nah Poo, the beautiful song of 'The Running Brook at Springtime and the Little Bird in the Tree,' as not more than five other musicians can play it (I say this modestly; as a matter of fact, I have not heard but two of them) and I am an old man, entitled to the respect of the young, even though he might be an idiot who does not know music."

"Did you reply to him?"

"Does the man on horseback pay attention to the mangy dog that yaps? But I shall not forget him, Nah Poo. Tell me what you want to know about him and his friends."

Kwong Yet unlocked the outer door, some minutes later, and came through the store into the room where they sat.

"I have a task to do for Nah Poo that I shall tell you of, Kwong Yet," the old man said at once, "and when you have heard it, you may help me do it, or you may not, as you wish. What obligation your father's brother owes to Nah Poo you already understand, yet he has not demanded payment. You know, because you remember my story, that he is an official, and you have

guessed that his being here has to do with those who avoid duties. He needs assistance that perhaps we can give, but although I was ready to promise in advance—indeed I had already promised, that time when it looked as though I would spend the remaining days of my life in jail—he made it clear that he does not ask us to do anything that would make us lose face with any one. He does not ask us to tell anything that would affect our tong or our clan."

The young Chinaman inclined his head in Napier's direction. "What my father's brother wishes me to do, I will do," he said. "His honor is the honor of our family. His promises are my promises."

"He has told me names," Kwong Li went on. "Charles Toy, and Tung Sheng, and Wang Ting, and Joe Fong. Joe Fong is the half-caste pig—may the bones of his fathers be dug up and scattered—who called to me this noon with insulting words, as I told you, Kwong Yet. Do you know any of these names?"

"All of them," Yet replied, "although I do not know any of the men themselves. They are undoubtedly smugglers, as our friend here thinks. At least I can tell you that they have opium to sell. But I have never asked many questions about them. There are people about whom it is not wise to be curious. And yet," he hastened to add, "I will ask questions, if it is the wish of my uncle."

"They have no connections with our family?" old Kwong queried.

"None."

"Their tong is not ours?"

"No. It is ——" He went to the window to look out before he finished the sentence, and when he came back he lowered his voice:

"Their organization is the Society of the Fragrant Lily. Charles Toy, whose name is Ng Choy, is its chief in these parts."

Napier needed no explanation of the young man's tiptoed excursion to the window or his uneasily hushed voice, for the Society of the Fragrant Lily is not to be spoken of lightly by a man with a yellow skin, or to be considered with contempt by any man, whatever his complexion. Its arm is long and its judgments ruthless. The Boxers, most of the worst of them, were members of the Society of the Fragrant Lily.

CHAPTER X

VILLABOSA sat in a comfortable chair in a corner of the customs office, physically more or less at ease—although he rested his cheek in his hand and from time to time extended his fingers upward to tenderly caress a contusion ornamented by a shaved area in which was centered a strip of sticking plaster—but seemingly low in his mind. He scowled at Napier's entrance, but tried to amend his expression in line with a plan of conduct he had worked out while waiting.

Erect and alert, Gordon sat at the flat desk several feet from the Mexican, watching him. On the desk top were spread various articles, quite plainly the salvage from the prisoner's pockets.

"I gathered them in before I took the cuffs off," Gordon cheerfully informed Napier. "Here's the persuader he swiped you with. Pleasant little instrument, isn't it?"

"Are you the man I struck?" Villabosa demanded. "I couldn't see you after I came to myself. Are you the man?"

Napier eyed him without answering.

"I felt sure it was a mistake, the minute I had done it," the Mexican went on earnestly. "I was turning you over to see if it wasn't a mis-

take, when ——" He shrugged and made a significant gesture toward Gordon and then toward his own damaged scalp. "I am certainly very sorry. I took you for another man."

"Who?" Napier asked, and Gordon put in, "We haven't had any conversation at all. I thought I would wait till you came. Except that he has asked me two or three times why I didn't take him to the police station."

"I decline to say who I thought it was," Villabosa declared, with only the slightest Spanish accent. "That would make me convict myself. This is what happened: I was walking through the street and I saw a man ahead of me who I thought was my enemy. I came up behind him and hit him. If it were you, why, I sure made a mistake." He tried to smile, but his effort was not particularly pleasant. "It is pretty clear I am telling the truth, isn't it? I didn't have any reason to hit you, a fellow that I never saw before in my life."

"Don't know me from Adam, eh?"

Villabosa spread his hands. "If I ever saw you I didn't know where," he said. "You know as well as I do that you and I had no quarrel."

"We've got one now," Napier told him. "We'll have one until my head stops aching, at least."

"I am ready to pay my fine. There is nothing else to do. To plead guilty and pay the fine. And I am willing, if you would not consider it wrong, to ask you to accept some—some dam-

ages, that is the word—for my mistake. I want to be fair. Am I not fair?"

"What were you looking for in my pockets?"

Villabosa's face indicated shocked surprise. "Pockets! No, sir. You are mistaken. I am not a robber. Look, there on the desk where this officer took it out of my clothes, is more than a hundred dollars, and I have money in the bank. No, *señor*. You are mistaken."

"You turned him over on his back and started to go through his pockets," Gordon remarked dispassionately. "He didn't ask you *did* you do it, but *why* you did it."

"You are mistaken. But why do I have to stay here, to talk only to you? I take it, from this office, that you are a government officer. Hitting a man—assault—isn't a crime against the United States, even if I got the right man, is it? I ask you to take me to the police. I will pay the fine. Or get bail, if that is what is required."

"After you tell me what you were trying to steal out of my pockets," Napier said.

Villabosa's continued denials were profuse and vehement. His tactics were obvious enough. He was not aware that Napier knew him at all; certainly not that he suspected him of any connection with the tragedy of the night before. He was hoping to bluff out the story of mistaken identity.

"What is your name and where do you live?" Napier demanded.

" Salvador Villabosa, and I live at the Bonham. They will tell you there about me. Believe me, mister, I am not the sort that goes about assaulting and robbing."

" Where were you last evening? "

" Last evening? " He hesitated a barely perceptible second. " Early in the evening, I was out on the street, seeing the parade. I was on the sidewalk not far from the Bonham when it went by. Afterward I was in the hotel, all the rest of the evening."

" You may have to prove that."

" I can." His assurance was too positive; too eager. It confirmed all the things Napier had believed.

"And you say you never saw me before in your life. Don't you know that I am stopping at the Bonham? "

" You are? " His surprise was well simulated. " I have not seen everybody who stops there. There are many guests at the Bonham, mister."

" You haven't seen me at any time during the past three or four days? "

" No, sir. Not that I remember."

" Who did your little dope-fiend friend come to see at the Bonham, last night? "

Villabosa was not adept at concealing emotion. The expression that came into his eyes, and the flush and succeeding pallor that mounted to his face, told how heavily the question had scored.

" Little dope-fiend friend," he repeated, stam-

mering. "I do not know who you mean. I have no such friend."

"Named Puenta," Napier supplied. "Weren't you standing there by the desk when he came into the lobby? He said you were."

"He said —— How could he, when he didn't look —— I mean, how could he, when I don't know any such person?"

"You followed him when he left and went up Houston Street and through Main and Military Plazas. What happened after that?"

"But I didn't follow him. I was at the hotel every minute after he left. I can prove it. Prove it by many people. Huh! You are guessing wrong there, *señor*. I was there in the lobby of the Bonham every minute from eleven o'clock until one. I can prove it."

"You say he didn't leave the Bonham until after eleven."

"I say —— No, I don't say that. I don't know what time he left, because I don't know him. I don't know anything about him. Who is he, this Angel Puenta?"

"Never heard of him, eh?"

"Never, on my word of honor."

"Then how did you know his first name was Angel?"

Villabosa saw his slip; his face showed it. But he tried to extricate himself. "It is the name you said. A dope-fiend named Angel Puenta, you told me. Say, mister! I don't want to be questioned like this. I haven't done

anything wrong, except hit a man that I thought was my enemy, and got the wrong fellow. Take me to the police station. If you won't, send word to my friends. I want a lawyer."

"It's hard to get a lawyer this hour of the night," Gordon remarked amiably. "Probably the man you wanted wouldn't be in. There won't be anything doing in lawyers for the present."

"But I demand it. I demand to have word sent. Either take me to a judge, or I shall get habeas corpus, and then we'll see."

Napier considered him silently for more than a minute, during which Villabosa again repeated his demand for friends and legal assistance. Then:

"Who killed Puenta?" he suddenly asked.

"I don't know. How should I know. I was at the hotel, I tell you. And I can prove it, too." He made a wriggling amendment, to square his previous admissions. "I know now who you are talking about. I saw about that killing in the newspaper. But I wasn't there. It was at twelve o'clock, the paper said, and at twelve o'clock ——"

"Yes, I know. You were at the Bonham, and you can prove it. And I can prove a few things, too. What interest did you have in that Chinese label?"

This time Villabosa, realizing at last that already he had talked too much, waited a moment before he answered, and then merely said, "I

don't know what you are talking about. I want a lawyer."

And to many other questions which Napier and Gordon threw at him during the next fifteen minutes his replies, over and over again, were the same. "I don't know." "I won't answer." "I want a lawyer."

They finally gave it up.

"Very well," Napier said. "We'll let you take the night to think it over. When you get ready to tell us what we want to know, you can send word." He rose and picked up the handcuffs that Gordon had tossed on the desk after relieving the prisoner of them. "We haven't any cells here in the Federal Building, have we?" he said to Gordon. "I suppose he has to go over to police headquarters."

"That's where we keep 'em," Gordon agreed. "As long as that is where he has been demanding to be taken, he ought to be tickled to death."

Villabosa glared, but held out his hands.

"How about my money and other things," he growled, indicating the small array of possessions on the desk.

"We'll put them in a nice sealed envelope and keep them all safe," Gordon assured him. "You'll get them back by and by—all except the blackjack. I don't believe you will ever crack another man over the head with that particular one. Do you know, I don't believe you are ever going to crack anybody over the head with *any* blackjack."

Gordon counted the money and made a memorandum of its amount before putting it into the envelope. He picked up and weighed in his hand a knife that could be called a pocket-knife, if one were merely trying to keep within legal definitions, but was large enough to be very dangerous in a scrimmage in which its wielder was one familiar with the use of edged steel, opened it and commented on the keenness of its blade.

"Not quite big enough to constitute 'concealed weapons,' but a handy little tool at that. They almost always have a practical knife about 'em somewhere, these Mexicans," he remarked to Napier. He put the knife, some papers which seemed to be of no consequence, and a watch and chain, into the envelope.

There remained of the prisoner's belongings on the desk only a small bunch of keys and a separate key, long, rectangular, flat and apparently quite new. As Gordon moved to sweep these in with the rest, Villabosa, whose eyes had been fixed on the agent's hands and whose chest was heaving with the emotion of his protests and demands, made an effort to calm himself and said, in what he tried to make a natural voice:

"I can't hurt anybody else or myself with my keys, can I? What's the use of keeping those?"

"We *especially* want to keep those," Napier replied quickly, a mere shot in the air suggested by the man's anxiety.

"*Car-r-ramba!*" Villabosa cried, losing all

control of himself and leaping at Gordon, handcuffed arms upraised. "I won't stand for it! I won't! I ——"

It is neither a difficult nor an especially creditable task for two powerful young men to subdue a middle-aged ruffian who is handcuffed. They did not even have to hurt him. When the excitement was over, Napier took up the flat key that seemingly had precipitated the outbreak and studied it carefully.

"A padlock, and a very up-to-date and rather high-priced padlock. Where is that padlock?" he asked.

Villabosa's reply was in muttered Spanish and clearly both profane and insulting.

"He mustn't get a chance to communicate with his friends," Napier whispered to Gordon, whom he had drawn into a corner after the envelope with Villabosa's belongings was safely locked in the desk. "Can it be arranged at the station? What sort of people are the police here?"

"They work with us very nicely; we have never had any trouble getting whatever assistance from them we asked. I don't think there will be any difficulty keeping him *incommunicado* there. You'll go over with us, won't you? Then I'll have the car take me home and drop you at the Bonham."

They came up to police headquarters through a narrow, dark street at the rear, and Gordon left Napier with the prisoner while he disappeared

into the building. When he came out he said, as much for Villabosa's information as for Napier's, "I wanted to be sure there weren't any visitors sitting around the guard room who might know him. There aren't."

Villabosa got the implication of this. "You *can't* lock me up secretly, and not let any one know I am here," he protested.

"Think so?"

"You have to put my name on the police book —the blotter—and anybody has a right to see that blotter. You have to. The law says so. A man can't be locked up without his name on the blotter. The police have to write it."

"So they do," Gordon replied. "Your knowledge of Texas law is excellent. All right. We'll go in."

At the desk Gordon addressed the sergeant, with whom it was plain he had already discussed the matter:

"We want this man held for us, please. His name is John Doe."

"The name is Salvador Villabosa," the prisoner declared loudly.

"John Doe, alias Salvador Villabosa," Gordon amended, and busied himself removing the handcuffs.

The sergeant wrote. Villabosa, craning his neck to watch, cried out excitedly. "Here, Mister Sergeant, I told you my name is Villabosa. Salvador Villabosa. You haven't written it."

"'John Doe, alias. For Federal,'" the ser-

geant read complacently from what he had written. "That's fair enough, isn't it? Do you expect an officer to clutter up the blotter with all a man's aliases?"

"When he wants to talk to us, get us word, will you?" Gordon said. "It isn't necessary for him to send messages to any one else."

"Sure," agreed the sergeant. "If he talks with anybody, it's you."

"But I demand a lawyer," Villabosa shouted. "I demand to have word sent to my friends. You *can't* hold me like this."

"Number 257," remarked the sergeant to the officer who stood at the prisoner's shoulder, waiting to take him to his lodging place, and entered the cell number against the name on the blotter. "Come on, *hombre,*" the officer said.

"But hold on! Wait! I demand ——"

"On our way," the turnkey interrupted and took Villabosa by the arm. The prisoner took one step, held back, and turned.

"I know what my rights are, Mister Sergeant," he threatened. "And I propose to have them."

"Sure," the sergeant agreed, with perfect good temper. "Sure you'll have 'em. Su-u-ure!" He waited until the prisoner had passed out of hearing. "If anybody *should* find out he was here and come around beefin' about it and demandin' to see him, I refer 'em to you people, as usual."

"Pass the buck to us," Gordon replied. "We take the responsibility."

Napier walked into the nearly deserted Bonham lobby, ten minutes later, and called for his room key. There was a slip of paper in the box with it. It read:

"Mr. Napier, please call Alamo 1266 as soon as he comes in. Important."

"How long has this been here? Do you know?" he asked the clerk.

The man shook his head regretfully. "I don't recall it's being put in your box since I came on," he said. "Before midnight, I guess."

As soon as he had reached his room Napier called the number.

"Hotel Edgemont," a sleepy voice replied.

"Some one there left a call for Mr. Napier, at the Bonham. Asked me to call your number as soon as I came in."

"Wait a minute," the operator languidly advised, and a moment later he heard her say, "There's your party at the Bonham."

"Hello," came in Miss Glenn's voice.

"This is Julian Napier. Did you call me?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Napier, but —— It was a long time ago. It must be after one o'clock, isn't it?"

"Yes. Quite a little after. I know it is terribly late, but the note I found said to get you as soon as I came in."

"Thank you for calling, but —— I couldn't

possibly see you to-night. Not at this hour. You see I 'phoned you about eleven."

"I'm sorry I woke you up," Napier apologized. "There wasn't anything on the memorandum to show what time the call came."

"I—I haven't been asleep." She hesitated, and then went on, "I wanted to see you. There was a matter —— There is a matter I want to talk to you about. It is an imposition to ask you, but I want —— I need a little advice."

"I am at your service whenever you wish. At what time to-morrow shall I call?"

"Really, Mr. Napier, I feel embarrassed asking you to take any interest in my affairs, but if it isn't too much trouble ——"

"It is no trouble whatever. It will be a real pleasure." The words sounded sincere, because they were.

"Then at ten o'clock, if that is convenient."

"I'll send up my name as near ten o'clock as I can get there."

"No," the girl objected. "Don't send up your name. I will be in the lobby or the little lounge that opens just off of it. If I am not there, would you mind waiting until I come? I would rather, if you don't mind, that you didn't send word up to our rooms."

He promised, she thanked him and said good-night, and he replaced the receiver. As he went about his preparations for bed—first solicitously surveying his damaged head in the bathroom mirror, and discovering with satisfaction that it

didn't look anywhere near as bad as it felt—he tried to imagine what she wanted to advise with him about, or to confess. He admitted to himself that he didn't like that word "confess" in connection with Miss Glenn, and yet, after what he had seen ——

She didn't want her father to know, that was plain enough. She didn't want him to know even that Napier was calling at the hotel. Her voice, now that he thought of it, had been very discreetly lowered throughout their conversation. Her father, if the door to his room were closed, would have been unable to make out what she said, even if he could have heard her at all.

After he had convinced his subconscious self that this was a night during which he must lie exclusively on his back and left side, because the northeast corner of his head could touch the pillow only at the cost of great discomfort, Napier went to sleep promptly enough. His last thought but one was wonder as to how she had ever first got mixed up with such a rotten crowd. His last thought, after impending sleep began to twist his imaginings into absurd channels and switch his reasonings beyond sensible control, was that a girl with eyes like that couldn't possibly have anything to confess.

CHAPTER XI

Although it still lacked three minutes of ten o'clock when Napier turned into the entrance of the Hotel Edgemont, Miss Glenn was waiting for him in the lounge. Except for her, the little room was unoccupied, and she met him at the door and led him to chairs in the further corner.

If she had slept less than usual the night before, he thought she did not show it. Nor did her manner show signs of the mental disturbance that her summons of the evening before had seemed to evidence. Some explanation of this came in almost her first sentence.

"It was so good of you to come," she told him. "I have been thinking how hysterical I must have seemed, calling you at all hours of the night. I got to thinking, and it seemed as if I simply had to talk to some one. Isn't it strange how different things look in the sunshine of the morning after?"

"If that means that the things that were troubling you have disappeared, let us be thankful there are no clouds in the sky," he said. "But it was no trouble to come, of course. Exactly the opposite. I am sorry I did not receive your message in time to get here last night."

She was a bit embarrassed, and he thought she

regretted having sent for him. It would be ungrateful as well as discourteous, however, not to give him any inkling of what she had wanted, even though, as she intimated, her morning worries were not as great as they had seemed in the dark hours. She set out to explain:

"Do you know, it sounds rather absurd, Mr. Napier, but I haven't any friends—I mean, here in San Antonio. Oh, acquaintances, of course," —as he murmured deprecatingly—"but no friends that I could go to in an emergency and ask to help me. And something came up ——"

She rather groped for words with which to tell it, while he waited, willing but unable to make it easier for her.

"I was a little frightened, last night. A little frightened and nervous. I thought I needed help. Advice, anyway. And the only person in the world I could think of was you. That must sound strange, considering how very slight our acquaintance is, but I had the feeling that —— Well, I have traveled a great deal, you know. I have met a good many people. I thought, if I were to ask you to help me, you would be the sort who would do what you could. And not misunderstand."

There was nothing of coquetry in her manner; she was looking him squarely in the face and talking seriously. "Man to man" was the phrase that came into his mind to describe her attitude. And he did not think she was trying to flatter him.

"If there is anything that I can do ——" he assured her, but she shook her head thoughtfully.

"I don't think there is, this morning. I can't even say there was anything in particular I thought you could do last night. It was just that I was nervous and excited, and I had to talk to somebody."

"Your father wasn't here?"

Instantly came into her face the expression that he had seen before when Captain Glenn was mentioned. "My father," she said, "was —— He is not well. There were reasons —— It happens to be a matter that I cannot talk over with him." As though she had said a little more than she intended, she made an amendment. "I wouldn't want him to know I was worried. His health ——"

Napier, as she left the sentence unfinished, suggested sympathetically:

"If you feel like telling me anything about what is troubling you ——"

She shook her head. "The foolish troubles of night," she said. "They do not sound real in the daytime. One can get terribly worked up over small things after going to bed in the dark and giving way to nerves. Giving way to nerves always has been and always will be a woman's privilege."

Napier did not believe Miss Glenn was subject to nerves, and he felt positive she had not been in bed before she called him at eleven o'clock.

She did not seem quite satisfied with the ex-

planation she had made; perhaps she felt she owed him a little more confidence under the circumstances.

"I actually felt, last night," she said, slowly and seriously, "that I was in danger, in a sense. It was quite silly, of course, but I had the feeling. And it seemed to me I *must* have some one I could call on if the thing that I thought was threatening ever really came to pass."

"Would it be too much to ask what sort of danger?"

"I'm afraid it would. If I were to tell you, you would think I had been reading thrillers. I might have told you if you had come last night, although I think more likely my nerves would have calmed down once you had arrived and I would have reneged, apologized, and sent you home again. But in this broad daylight—it would sound perfectly outrageous." She laughed lightly. "This is San Antonio, United States of America, in the Twentieth Century."

"There *can* be dangers, even in the United States of America and the Twentieth Century," he said quietly. "Not as many as there can be in the East, or as there could be in other centuries, perhaps, but this place and time isn't free from them."

"If I didn't know something of the East I shouldn't have been as frightened as I was last night," she said impulsively. "It is because I have seen there what people who propose to have their own way, and are in the habit of getting

it——" Seemingly this sentence was bound farther than she wanted to go, for she halted it abruptly. "I'm still a little upset, I guess. It is awfully good of you to be willing to let me make an exhibition of temperament so patiently."

"If it shouldn't be temperament," Napier said. "If it should turn out that there really *was* something to worry about, I expect to be in San Antonio some little time, and I shall be at the Bonham—unless I am able, later, to get rooms here at the Edgemont. They didn't have any when I was here yesterday."

"That's awfully good of you," she assured him, and seemed disposed to dismiss the matter, but he was unwilling to let the subject drop without adding a word. He spoke earnestly:

"I think you really *have* a bit of trouble. And I am sincere when I say I would like to have you call on me if there is anything I can do. It isn't merely a polite promise."

"What makes you think so?" she demanded, ignoring the latter part of his speech.

"I, too, have lived in the East."

The quick glance that she threw him told him she wondered if there were anything significant in his remark; if he could possibly know that her trouble might have an Oriental side. As his face showed only sympathy—and, perhaps, admiration—she apparently dismissed the thought as unreasonable. But from the seriousness with which she sat for a moment in silence, while he tactfully waited, he knew she was turning her

problem over in her mind, perhaps readjusting some former decision. When she looked up, her eyes rested on his frankly.

"I am going to be quite honest," she said. "It wasn't all a matter of getting nervous in the dark. I made up my mind, after thinking it over this morning, not to say anything to you of the things I would have said if you had been able to get here last night, and I am not going to say all of them, even now. But I am going to tell you that I am terribly worried over something that may turn out very seriously. I really may need somebody to help me—badly. I can't tell you what the trouble is. There is a possibility—I think maybe a probability—that it won't come to a head at all. But if it should, I would be all alone here."

She seemed unconscious that her words implied the absence of her father, and he wondered if the danger that threatened her was indirect, by being aimed at him. He opened his mouth to urge her to tell him, in personal confidence, what she feared. He closed it again as he realized that he could not accept, in confidence, what might prove to be a confession. His reply, warm and sincere as it really was, nevertheless contained a hidden reserve.

"If you should be in trouble and should call upon me, I want you to believe that I would do everything to help you that was in my power."

"If I am, I will." She smiled, trying to ease the tension. "I shall get word to you the first

thing. I shall say, 'Dear Mr. Napier; it's happened.'"

"And I, to use the expressive language of Texas, shall 'come a-runnin','" he assured her. "Even if it is in the most depressing hours of the night, when our spirits get lowest."

"It probably will be in those dark hours, if you ever get it," she declared. "If I were to wait until daylight, I'd finally find there wasn't really any danger, and——" She broke off and dropped the badinage. "That isn't so," she said, serious again. "If I send for you at all, I'm afraid I'll really need you. You will forgive me if I don't tell you any more about it, won't you? I can't really understand why I have told you as much as I have, or why I telephoned you. We are practically strangers."

"I have known you eight years."

She shook her head. "You do not know me at all. And I don't know you, except that you are an American man. One learns to appreciate American men, the right kind of American men, after meeting so many foreigners—as in the East."

He wondered if she was thinking of Orientals in the East, or Orientals transplanted to the West. It came to him how little any foreigner, either Oriental or Continental, would or could have understood her frank appeal to him for help in an hour of need. He did not take too much credit to himself for her confidence; she was a shrewd, sophisticated young woman who

had seen enough of life to gauge men more or less and pick out those who were probably ordinarily decent. Of course he felt pleased and complimented; who would not? He looked at her earnestly and honestly and said, "If you should need me, I'll try to come up to specifications."

"I'm really very sorry I can't ask you to call on me formally," she said. "It seems so absurd, my telling you all this and asking you to run to my assistance if something should happen that probably won't—and yet not asking you to come and see me. But you will forgive me. As I told you yesterday, my father ——"

He rose. "Let us hope he will soon be better," he said. "When he is ——"

"You know I'd like to have you," she assured him. He felt certain she spoke with perfect sincerity.

He went back to the Bonham, found no mail or telegrams, and went out to stroll about the streets, not yet crowded but beginning to be filled with sight-seers, mostly out-of-town people in their best city-visiting clothes, wandering rather aimlessly but with a determined holiday spirit. At noon he took lunch where he happened to be, in a little dairy restaurant. He was sauntering, afterward, through Alamo Plaza, his mind revolving theories which refused to work out at all satisfactorily, when his attention focussed sharply on the figure of Madame Lucia Frezzi, just disappearing into the entrance of the Plaza Hotel.

It was only a glimpse, but he knew he was not

mistaken. He crossed the plaza and went into the hotel, stopping at the cigar counter and glancing at magazines on the news stand. After a bit, not seeing her, he looked into the several public parlors, and finally decided, unless she was above the first floor, that she must be in one of the dining-rooms.

Several people were ahead of him as he came up to check his hat, and perhaps ten minutes had elapsed since he first saw her before he stood in the main dining-room, surveyed the tables, and informed a grand-mannered head waiter that he was looking for friends.

She was there, facing him at a side table, and there was a man across the cloth from her. Napier could see only his shoulders and the back of his head. Obviously they were just beginning lunch, and there would be ample time before they finished to telephone for an agent from the customs office and have her followed. He was about to turn and leave the room, with a manner implying that the friends for whom he was searching were not present, when Madame Frezzi suddenly looked toward the door and saw him.

Her face lighted with pleased recognition, and she smiled cordially. There was nothing to do but look equally delighted and step over to her table.

"Mr. Napier!" she exclaimed, as he came within hearing. "What a pleasure!"

As she half rose to welcome him, her com-

panion came courteously to his feet, pushing his chair back, and stood, napkin in hand and an amiable smile on his face, waiting to be presented.

It was Kalat Pasha.

CHAPTER XII

"Mr. Sastanada; Mr. Napier," she introduced them. Kalat extended a friendly hand and bowed gracefully. "Mr. Napier and I met in Paris," she told him. "Four—five years ago."

"Have you lunched, Mr. Napier?" Kalat asked in English that was precise and a trifle too correct. "Won't you sit down with us?" Without waiting for a reply, he signalled to a hovering waiter, who brought a third chair.

"Thank you," Napier said, dropping into the seat. "I'm sorry I can't have lunch, but I already have an appointment. It was to have been here—at least, that is the way the message was delivered—but I am pretty sure he said the St. Francis, and I shall have to go over there. Telephone messages taken by a third party——" He smiled and dismissed his annoyance. "It is a great pleasure to see you again," he told Madame Frezzi. "There are many miles between here and the Rue de Varenne."

"I have been in the United States some little time," she said. "But I have always put off visiting my relatives here until now. They told me I would enjoy the Fiesta, and I have. It is very interesting, isn't it?"

"As distinctive, in its way, as the Mardi Gras," he agreed.

"I have never seen the Mardi Gras."

"Its atmosphere is French, of course, while the Fiesta San Jacinto is essentially Spanish. I always enjoy these carnivals. I am especially impressed with the fact that they are only possible in cities where there is much Latin blood and a Latin tradition. Any attempt to accomplish a carnival spirit like this in a Northern city in the United States would be a dreary failure."

"We Latins know how to play," Kalat put in.

"Mr. Sastanada is a fellow countryman of mine," Madame Frezzi explained.

"Ah?" Napier remarked, politely. "From what part of Italy?"

"Oh, but you are not remembering me as well as I hoped you did," the lady cried, "or else you were misinformed. I am Spanish."

"Perhaps I thought the name was Italian."

"It is. My husband was of Italian blood." From the tense of the verb, Napier took it the husband who once was conveniently absent was now conveniently deceased. "My relatives here are Spanish, although they have lived for a number of years in Mexico. 'Had lived' would be a better way of saying it, because they have been in San Antonio since the revolutions began. They were so unfortunate as to be Cientificos."

"You are, like us, a tourist?" Kalat asked. "Or have you business interests here?"

"I am a visitor."

"Mr. Napier is in business in New York—or was," Madame Frezzi said. "I am sure I recall that it was mentioned by some one, the first time we met."

"Your memory is better than mine was as to your nationality," Napier laughed. "I was—and am."

"In what business?" Kalat asked. His interest was merely polite, the interest of one who knows that some Americans like to discuss their commercial concerns.

"Not a very active one during the past few years," Napier said. "Oriental importations." He took out a business card and laid it before Kalat.

He looked at his watch, with an apology; he must have time, before they finished luncheon, to telephone the collector's office.

"I hope you can come and see me," Madame Frezzi said. "I haven't a card with the address, of course, but if you would make a note of it—I am at Number 311 Chiromoya Street. I am always at home Wednesdays, after three. This has been no meeting at all. Do come."

"I shall be delighted to," he told her, and noted the address.

"I hope we also shall meet again," Kalat said, as Napier rose to leave.

"I hope so." He said the proper things to Madame Frezzi and left them.

From a pay station across the plaza he got Collector Lamb's office and was so fortunate as

to find Gordon back from lunch and with no important work in hand. Guardedly he told him what he wanted. " I shall be inside the doorway of the drug store just across from the main entrance," he said, " and when he comes out I will shake out my handkerchief. He is rather stout, quite dark, smooth-shaven and exceedingly well dressed in a light suit; there isn't one chance in a thousand that two men of that description will come out together. If there should, however, make some sign with your hand toward one of them and one shake of the handkerchief means ' yes '; two, ' no.' "

" O. K.," said Gordon. " And I'm to stick to him till further notice? "

" If you please. I will come over to the office as soon as you have got started, of course, and talk it over with Mr. Lamb. If he has something else he wants you to do, I will ask him to have you relieved. If things break so you can, you might telephone in later and ask him."

" That won't be necessary, I know," Gordon said. " There isn't anything in the works at this minute that he thinks half as important as your affair. All right. I'll be over just as soon as I can get there."

Napier saw the wiry young man arrive and take up a position that, without being conspicuous, commanded both entrances to the hotel and the drug store in whose busy doorway he waited. He saw Kalat and Madame Frezzi, after a while, come leisurely out and move up the plaza, afoot,

and he shook his handkerchief. Gordon disappeared, strolling aimlessly behind them.

He went over to the Federal Building at once and saw Collector Lamb.

"Please excuse me for seeming to give your men orders," he said, "but you were out, and the matter couldn't wait. It was Kalat himself."

The collector nearly permitted himself to show excitement.

"Are you sure?"

"I sat for fifteen minutes nearer to him than I am to you." Napier recounted the circumstances of the meeting.

"He asked your business, you say. Do you suppose he knows?"

"I don't think so. It is possible Madame Frezzi might know—she might have learned in Paris—and, of course, she could have tipped him while I was crossing the room. But if he had known, I think he would have said more about his presence here in San Antonio. He would have explained. The fact that he had no reason to suppose I knew him wouldn't have altered that. As a matter of fact, he explained nothing. He didn't even refer to it, except to intimate that he was a tourist. In other words, he acted exactly as a Spanish friend of Madame Frezzi's, who was anxious to be courteous to one of her old acquaintances but had no other interest whatever in him, would have acted."

"What is the connection between those two?"

Napier shook his head. "That remains to be

learned. If we could get a line on her, it might help us. When I telegraphed Washington Monday night, asking for information regarding Captain Glenn, I also asked them to see what they could dig up about Madame Frezzi. They have passed the request on to our people in Paris; it is almost time to get a reply. She and Kalat *could* have met for the first time right here in San Antonio, within the past week."

Lamb considered this and nodded to its possibility. "And she could really believe that his name is Sastanada," he added.

"She could, and yet I doubt it. It isn't likely she dropped her work—whatever it was—when the war began, and secret agents began to be really valuable. No. Before I felt certain that her presence here is entirely due to a desire to visit Spanish relatives and witness the carnival, I would want some evidence beyond her simple say-so. Which, naturally, I shall try to get."

"It's good progress, anyway. Mighty good progress. If you should happen to be able to connect this alleged Spaniard Sastanada with any of the Mexicans who are mixed up with these Chinks ——" He broke off. "I was so interested in what you had to tell me that I almost forgot I had something to tell you," he said. "The chief of police telephoned a few minutes before you came to say he wanted to talk to me about this fellow Villabosa that you and Gordon locked up over at headquarters, last night. That was a

good job, too; Gordon told me about it. How is your head?"

"Sore, but not troublesome, if I take pains in adjusting my hat. I have been so busy to-day I've hardly had time to think about it. What has happened regarding Villabosa? Is he ready to talk?"

"I don't think so; the chief didn't intimate it, anyway. He was a little careful about what he said over the 'phone; he didn't mention Villabosa's name at all; I took it for granted somebody was in hearing, or perhaps he didn't feel sure of who might have been listening in somewhere. He said he was coming over this way and would drop in to see me. He ought to be here pretty soon."

"Police chiefs don't always take that much trouble for the Federal outfits."

"This one does. He sees things from our end as well as the police end; he used to be in the Federal service himself, in the D. J."

Announced by a clerk, only a few moments later, the chief came in and was introduced to Napier.

"You must be the fellow who stumbled over that Angel Puenta over on the West Side, night before last," was his opening comment, when the ceremony of shaking hands and lighting the inevitable Southwestern cigarettes had been concluded.

"I was. How did you know?"

"Burlen described you. When you get

through with this case you're on now, I wish you'd take a little vacation from your regular job and find out for my department who killed that Mex."

"Aren't the detectives making headway?" Lamb asked.

"If they are they're in reverse gear," the chief declared. "They know less about it now than they did right after it happened." He grinned amiably. "Right after it happened they knew *all* about it."

"If I fall over any evidence as I fell over Puenta, I'll try to help you get the murderer," Napier smiled. "Did they ever find the knife?"

"Nary sign of it."

"If I had been the killer, I would have thrown it away," Napier said positively. "Once he started to escape through that alley, he took a chance of meeting some one at the further end, with no opportunity to turn back. He wouldn't hide the knife in his clothes, and get them blood-stained, and the chances he was taking if he carried a knife in his hand —— If he didn't get rid of it, he was a fool."

"Well, nobody seems to have seen him coming out of the alley," the chief said dryly. "And whoever he met, after that, it wasn't a policeman."

He stooped to discard the end of his cigarette. "What I came over for," he said, "was to tell you that this pock-marked Mex that you've locked up over in our hotel is certainly anxious

to get word to his friends. Ever hear of Pedro Flores of Eagle Pass?"

"Never," Napier replied. "Who is he?"

"Search me! He is this prisoner's one best bet, I gather. This Villabosa—that's his name, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"He said it was; I thought he was telling the truth. The blotter, you know, says just 'John Doe, alias.' Well, this Villabosa is making a good deal of a holler. He seems mighty set on having somebody find out where he is so they can start habeas corpus proceedings. Thus far he hasn't succeeded in getting any word out, so far as I know—I'm pretty sure of it—but I'm not sure he can't, sooner or later. We've got as good policemen as any town—but he is a good promiser. He *might* find one who needed the money, especially as we wouldn't ever be able, probably, to find out who did it."

"Trying to bribe the officers, eh?"

"Last I heard he was up to a hundred dollars, and giving indications that he would go higher. So I thought I'd better come over and see you. Of course, I don't know whether it is vitally important to your case that nobody shall find out he is there, because I don't know what the case is, but I gathered from what Gordon told the sergeant that you would prefer his friends didn't get to him."

"We very much prefer it. And it is important."

"Maybe I'd better tell you what happened, and you can make your own decision. When I came on, this morning, I saw the entry on the blotter and heard about the request that he be kept *incommunicado,* and I went down, naturally, to look him over. He went at me, hammer and tongs, the minute I showed up. Demanding to be arraigned, to have a lawyer, to see his friends. Knows quite a lot of law, of one sort and another. Mentioned the Constitution and statutes of the State of Texas pretty fluently, and when I came away I think he was beginning to quote the Constitution of the United States. He was sure anxious to get word somewhere, *pronto.* Well, that was all there was of that. About an hour ago one of the officers—man named Hathaway—happened to have an errand that took him into that part of the station."

"I know Hathaway," Lamb said. "Good man, isn't he?"

"One of the best I've got. Well, he sung out to Hathaway and began to tell him his troubles. Hathaway, knowing his business, went over and listened. When this Villabosa thought he had him sympathetic, he came across with his big thought. Hathaway was to slip out and send a telegram for him, and the honorarium was to be fifty dollars. He raised it to seventy-five, and just before Hathaway left, it went to a hundred. The telegram was to go to Pedro Flores, Eagle Pass, and it was merely to say where Villabosa was and that he was *incommunicado.*"

"And Flores, naturally, would start the necessary machinery moving," Napier said. "I wonder why he didn't name some of his local friends. He has some."

"That's no riddle I know the answer of," the chief said. "But he didn't mention a single other person except Flores. Well, that's all there is to it. Far be it from me to intimate that there is any chance over in that establishment of mine for a leak, but a hundred dollars is a lot of money, and I can't draw a dead line and keep policemen from getting within hearing of him. I don't *think* any of them would fall for it, but you ought to know how the situation lies. If the important thing is that Villabosa sha'n't see anybody, there is nothing to worry about, because if any of his friends should call, we would refer them to you and let it go at that. But if it is vital that they sha'n't even know where he is—well, there's a little chance, and it don't get us anywhere to ignore it."

"It is important that nobody shall know where he is," Napier said. "What other place is there where he could be kept?"

"The county jail, I suppose, if they've got room and the sheriff is willing, and of course he would be. But that wouldn't be any improvement. Human nature is the same in a county jail as in a police station, and a hundred dollars is just as big."

"In all this we are overlooking the most vital thing. We not only need to keep his friends

from getting at him, or even from learning where he is, but he has got to be made to talk, if possible. If I haven't doped our case wrong, he would be able to straighten us out on a number of things that we need to know—badly."

"Of course, not knowing anything about the case——" the chief began, when Napier interrupted.

"I'm going to tell you about it, and I hope you won't be offended when I tell you that I have held out some evidence on your department. If I had met you, or known that you used to be in the Federal Service, I would have gone to you first thing with it, but having been in the service, you know yourself how it is. Some police departments are all right, and some get jealous."

The chief admitted this with a gesture.

Napier rapidly outlined the main points of his case, telling of his quest for Kalat Pasha and the diamonds from the sultan's sash. He spoke of a woman who smiled at him, speaking no names and not mentioning that there were two, and told of the messenger who came from her with a summons, of the orange label that fluttered from his pocket to the floor of the Bonham lobby, and of the walk to the Mexican section that came to an abrupt end with the killing of his guide.

"I didn't tell the officers that he spoke before he died, or that he had this in his hand," Napier concluded, producing the torn fragment of the label. "Perhaps you won't agree with me, but from my viewpoint, if a bunch of detectives ever

started asking Chinamen questions about a thing like that, the case would be gummed in five minutes. So I held out on you."

The chief, who had listened without interrupting, nodded good-naturedly. "I don't blame you," he said. "I would have done the same, when I was in the D. J."

"Our cases really dovetail," Napier went on. "If we find the diamonds, we stand a fair-to-middling chance of finding out who killed Puenta, and whatever credit there may be for landing him will go to you people, naturally. Public credit, as you know from your own experience, is a thing we fellows don't seek."

"Fair enough," the chief agreed. "Thanks." He reached over to the collector's box, helped himself to a cigarette, and lighted it thoughtfully. "Do you know," he said, "I was pretty sure, if I came over here this afternoon, you would be on the level and tell me about Puenta."

"Did you think we ——" Lamb began.

The chief nodded. "You see, I couldn't help putting two and two together. Here was Puenta, a dope-fiend, with some connection with Chinks that are supposed to be tangled up in opium smuggling; all of them are. Here was a strange special agent of the Treasury Department in town. After what? Smugglers wouldn't be a bad guess, seeing as that is what you're always after. Puenta is over on the West Side, heading toward the Chinese quarter, and gets

killed. You happen to be right there and notify the police. Well ——"

"It was good figuring and correct," Napier said.

"And then, besides all that," the chief grinned, "when I went down to call on Villabosa, this morning, he happened to say that it was impossible he could have been mixed up in the murder of Puenta, like you accused him last night, because he was in the lobby of the Bonham all the time and could prove it. So I thought I'd come over and find out."

"And you did, very artistically," Napier remarked, and joined in the laugh. "And now that you know what we know, and we know what you know, what are we going to do to make Villabosa tell us something about that Chinese label that was on the box that had a diamond in it?"

The chief became instantly serious. "Unless I'm a poor judge, he isn't ready to talk yet, and he isn't going to be ready to talk for some time. If he can get word to his friends and start habeas corpus or something like that, he figures he won't ever have to talk. It's my strong opinion that you could keep him over in our place a week, and still he would keep his tongue between his teeth, unless there was more pressure put on him than either you or I have any way to put on. I don't know as you know much about these Mexicans, Mr. Napier, but Mr. Lamb does. It's darned hard to make them talk, especially when something bad, like a murder, is involved. The

Rangers have the best luck with them, and *they* don't always succeed. But if I were you, and there was any good, old-time Ranger within reach, I'd get to him and holler for help."

"They are all mortally afraid of the Texas Rangers," Lamb explained to Napier. "And with good cause."

"It would have to be one of the best," the chief said. "None of these young fellows that have gone in lately. I don't know whether any of the old-timers are in town, but ——"

"I saw Captain Dalton on the street only this forenoon," Lamb broke in. "Didn't speak to him, except to say 'howdy.' If he isn't on some important work, and if you agree that he would be a good man, I could telephone Austin and ask them to lend him to the government for a day or two."

"You do the telephoning, and I'll locate the cap'n and ask him to come over and see us," the chief agreed with enthusiasm. "I didn't know he was in town. Why, he's our one best bet in the Ranger service. If there is one man more than another in the State of Texas that can put the fear of God into the heart of a Mexican, it's Bob Dalton."

CHAPTER XIII

THEY sat in the chief's office at four o'clock, the chief, Napier and Dalton, and the special treasury agent again told his story for the Ranger's benefit.

Captain Dalton smoked quietly throughout the recital without displaying excessive interest and did not once interrupt. He was a tall man, with broad shoulders and a tapering waist, calm gray eyes and a wind-burned, leathery skin. His age was forty-six, and one who saw only his face might have said he was ten years older than that, but one who saw only his body would have been more likely to guess ten years younger.

Off duty, clothed as any comfortably well-to-do cattleman on a visit to town might have been clothed, his movements moderate and unhurried, it was not easy for Napier to fit the Ranger's appearance into the tales the chief had told him while they waited for him to come,—tales that explained why Dalton was distinguished for initiative, resourcefulness and courage even in an organization which expects all those qualities from its members as a matter of course and in the day's work.

It was hard to visualize in this quiet, reserved person the unhesitating dead shot and lightning

gun man that he was reputed to be. His low-pitched, drawling voice did not sound as though it could, in desperate emergency, bark harsh commands that would overawe a mob, as—so the chief said—Dalton had more than once done, single-handed. During the sinister Plan of San Diego in 1915, when the southern half of Texas was to be captured and restored to Mexico, "all white Americans being killed, but no negroes," as the manifesto naïvely proposed, Dalton had had charge of the Rangers in several border counties where Mexicans outnumbered Americans fifty to one, and the manner in which he and his men had handled the situation had established forever his reputation among the bandits who came across the river and their swarm of friends on the northern side as one who hurled swift-driving bullets first and discussed the matter afterward (if, indeed, he discussed it at all), yet was neither a bully nor a murderer.

"So there is the situation," Napier concluded. "Villabosa knows something about this label." He indicated the orange slip lying before them on the chief's desk. "He probably knows who killed Puenta. I want to find out about one and the chief, here, wants to know about the other."

"I told him if anybody could make a Mexican admit that he wasn't entirely without sin, it was you," the chief said.

"I don't know," the Ranger said. "I don't know. I kain't do any impossibilities. You haven't got anything—anything else, I mean—

on this Villabosa. Don't know who his friends are, or his connections, or anything."

"Yes. We know he used to be tied up with a crowd that was supposed to be friendly to Villa," Napier said. "And we got this new name—this Pedro Flores, of Eagle Pass."

"I'll have somebody look Pedro up," Dalton said. "It may help us get a line on this other *hombre*. About this Villa outfit, didn't you say all that was several years ago?"

"Yes."

"There's no telling from whom a Mexican's friends were some years ago what brand he's wearing now. Well, maybe we better have a look at him. He might be ready to say something by now, without any unusual pressure. If he isn't, I'll try to be thinking up something to suggest while you are talking to him. Suppose you have him in and don't mention me. We'll see whether he knows me. If he doesn't, at the right minute,—after I have butted into the conversation, say,—you might mention my name and see what happens."

The chief pressed a button and ordered that Villabosa be brought to them. Napier leaned forward to pick up the piece of orange label from in front of the chief and hesitated. "I wonder if it wouldn't be just as well to let that lie there in plain sight while we are talking to him, and not refer to it, at first," he suggested.

"It will help keep him guessing," Dalton approved. "Pretty well over this side of the desk,

where he kain't grab it and eat it, or something like that."

Villabosa was brought in and the officer who escorted him, at the chief's order, went out and closed the door.

"You can sit down in that chair," the chief told him, indicating. He obeyed, and silence followed. The eyes of the three men were upon him, but they did not speak. Villabosa scowled from one to the other.

"Why don't I have a lawyer?" he finally cried. "Ever since last night I have been here, demanding a lawyer, and you do not let me send for him. I know my rights, and I'll get them, too."

"You'll get them," the chief said significantly and fell silent again.

"I haven't done anything except hit this man by mistake, and I am willing to plead guilty to that," the prisoner began, and then his eye fell on the bit of bright paper with its sprawling Chinese ideographs. He stopped, looked quickly about the hostile triangle, and swallowed. "Why don't you let me send for a lawyer?" he demanded, in a much less truculent voice.

"Who knifed Angel Puenta?" the chief snapped at him. "Come on. Don't tell us you don't know, because you do."

Again his eyes fluttered to the fragment of label. "I don't know anything about him," he replied. "On my word of honor, I don't. I told this man I didn't, and I told the truth." He

nodded toward Napier. "You can find out at the Bonham ——"

"Who did you get word to? Who did you tell that Puenta had it in his pocket?" It was a shot in the dark, but it had its effect. Villabosa did not immediately answer in words, but his eyes went sharply to the blotch of color on the desk. "Yes, that's it," the chief followed up. "You get what I mean. Who did you get word to?"

"I don't know what you mean at all. See here, chief, and you too,"—to the others. "I'm not going to say another word until I get a lawyer. I haven't done anything, and I don't propose to let you put up any job on me. I want to notify my friends where I am."

Dalton, while Villabosa was saying this, had taken a paper from his pocket and was studying it, looking up every line or so to stare at Villabosa's face. It was a printed paper and looked like a police description of some wanted fugitive, as, in fact, it was,—the description of an American youth aged eighteen who was greatly desired in El Paso for the embezzlement of his employer's funds.

"He certainly answers the description," he suddenly said to the chief.

The chief smiled with satisfaction. "I thought he would."

Villabosa said nothing, shifting his gaze from one to the other warily. The chief, still smiling, gave him a bit of casual information. "This is Captain Dalton, of the Rangers."

The Mexican's eyes narrowed, and Napier knew that he was well aware of Dalton's reputation. The chief had said there wasn't a bad Mexican in Texas who didn't fear him mortally, but he hardly looked for such speedy confirmation of it, on the mere mention of his name.

"Yes," Dalton told the chief again, folding the paper and replacing it in his pocket. "It shore looks like he is the man." Napier noticed that he hadn't said he *was* the man, either time. He felt certain the qualification had been for the prisoner's benefit, although he couldn't see the point of it. He was not familiar with the one piece of Ranger tactics that may be depended upon beyond all others to terrify a Mexican with a guilty conscience.

"Are you demanding that we turn him over to you?" the chief asked.

"Not necessarily," Dalton said. "When we hear his story about this killing here in San 'Ntonio, we'll see. Maybe, if he tells it straight, I'll let you hold on to him. It's going to be a lot of trouble to take him way down there by the river to get him identified. Me, I'd just as lives not have to do it. And Ranger Hard, who would have to go along with me, he's just got in town here after three months' border duty, and he'll shore feel mean if he has to quit when he's hardly got started to amusing himself—he's got a girl here, too—to go gallyhooting down into that country guarding this feller. No. Let's hear what he's got to say about this case here, and

maybe it'll be all right for you to hold him. We'll see after he comes through."

At Dalton's opening words in reply to the chief's query, Villabosa's eyes fixed themselves on the Ranger's face. When Dalton spoke of taking him "way down there by the river" to get him identified, muscles in his cheeks twitched nervously. As it appeared that two Rangers would make the journey, and that at least one of them would feel disgruntled at having to leave San Antonio, he sat back in his chair, breathing hard. When Dalton finished, he began to sputter with fluent desperation.

"You can't do it!" he cried. "You can't do it! No, chief, don't turn me over to him. Don't do it, chief. I won't stand for it!"

"You'll stand for it if he demands it," the chief told him coldly. "However, if you've got anything you want to say about this Angel Puenta killing, and this piece of paper that you saw fall out of his pocket in the Bonham, we'll hear it."

"I don't know anything about it," Villabosa protested. "And I don't know anything about this other thing this Ranger talks about, either. I haven't done anything down in any of the river counties. They don't want me for anything, honest, chief. He don't say I'm the man; didn't you notice that? He only says I look like the man. He wants to get me down in one of those counties, and ——" He stopped, panting.

"We're waiting for that story about Puenta."

"I tell you I don't know anything about Puenta. Listen, chief! They take a man down to the river, these Rangers, and maybe somebody identifies him as a murderer, or something, but maybe nobody does. What does the Ranger report say? What did it say when Liborio Tamez started for the Rio Grande and never got there? You know what it said: 'Killed while attempting to escape.' The *ley fuega.* I won't go, chief. Don't let him take me."

"Was Liborio Tamez a friend of yours?" The significance of this was lost on Napier until afterward, when he learned that Tamez was a leader in the insane plot of 1916 to seize, burn and loot a chain of South Texas cities and towns —as desperate a bandit as ever met a violent and just reward.

"No. But everybody knows what happened to him. Chief!" His voice lifted a bit hysterically. "Don't turn me over to the Rangers."

"All right. We'll see. What about Puenta?"

But if he feared the Rangers, it might be judged there were other things he feared as much, for he persisted in denying all knowledge of the little Mexican's death or of the Chinese label that was in his pocket. Frightened he obviously was, but not frightened enough to confess. His nerve was clearly shaken, but it did not break, and after a period of protests, appeals and demands, he suddenly got a grip on himself.

"I—don't—know—anything—about—Pu-

enta," he declared, with emphasis on every word. "And I'm through. I am not going to say another thing until I get a lawyer, and if you won't send for one, I'll get one somehow. This is an outrage, and I won't stand for it. When I get out, I'll make you pay for it, the whole of you. I am not wanted by the police down on the border for anything, and you know it. I warn you not to send me down there. If there is anybody there who thinks he can identify me, let him come up here. I'll pay all his expenses, and this man" —jerking his head toward Napier—" has money enough of mine to foot the bills, and I give him authority to spend it for that, now." He sat back, pale but determined. " Now you can lock me up again, or you can let me go, just as you please, but you won't get any story out of me, because I haven't got anything to tell—or you can go to the devil." He spat the words, envenomed.

The chief raised his eyebrows and looked at Dalton, who had listened quite unmoved to the Mexican's peroration.

"All right," the Ranger captain said. " If you don't mind, I'll get hold of Ranger Hard, and Señor Villabosa can get ready to start on a little journey."

" Do it!" Villabosa defied him. " Do it, and my friends will learn where I am—and once I get before a judge on a habeas corpus you'll let me go quick, and you know it. Do it! Start me for the border. Somebody will see me that knows me."

"Not in an automobile, after dark," Captain Dalton told him equably. "And they won't hear you, either, because you'll be gagged."

"Take him back," the chief commanded the officer who responded to his signal.

The prisoner was hardly out of the room before his voice rang loudly through the corridor. "Villabosa!" he shouted. "My name is Villabosa. Salvador Villabosa. Are there any reporters here? Print it. Salv——" An abrupt cessation of the bellow indicated that a hard and heavy hand had come into action as an extinguisher.

The chief stepped to the door and spoke to a passing officer. "Are there?" he asked.

"Are there what, chief?"

"Any reporters in the building. Look quick. If there are, ask them to come here right away. And see if anybody else seemed to take any notice of that man's yelling."

The officer was back in a moment. "Nobody here at all just now except officers. Not an outsider on the floor."

"All right," the chief dismissed him and turned to where Dalton was rolling a fresh cigarette, seemingly very much at peace with the world. "What was the matter?" he asked. "We almost had him going for a minute. What changed him?"

"Well," the Ranger drawled, still busy with the adequate manufacture of his smoke. "For one thing, he got to thinking that maybe it was

all a bluff, and that if it wasn't, he would have plenty of time to squeal after he was sure it wasn't. For another, maybe he's as afraid of somebody that would get him if he told what he knows as he is of the Rangers. And, another thing, he kept sizing me up and wondering if I was the kind of a feller that would take a Mexican out and kill him in cold blood—and guessed right on the answer."

He scratched a match and inhaled deeply. "But there is a lot of time to change his mind as to that," he said. "Maybe, by to-morrow, he'll feel different. If not, he will sooner or later, or he's got more nerve than most of 'em. When Hard and I get him out in the sticks, and he realizes there ain't any chances of dodging one kind of a hereafter or another—we'll see."

"Where are you going to take him?" Napier asked.

"Down here about a hundred miles to a little farm that I happen to own, down in San Miguel County. There's nobody there but one man, who can be depended on, and Villabosa will suppose that it is the county where somebody needs to be identified for something. If necessary, I prob'ly will have a few folks I can trust come see him from time to time and look him over speculative. In the meantime we'll see what we can find out about him. That name at Eagle Pass was Pedro Flores, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"It's some common name, and I suppose there

are ten of 'em there, but I'm betting there ain't more'n one that would be the kind of feller this Villabosa would be trying to get word to. He isn't telegraphing any common *pelado.* This feller is prob'ly some prominent among the Mex population. If we kin get a line on Pedro, it may give us something on Villabosa. All I need to know is who his friends are on the other side of the river, and I'll take my chances on being able to make the information useful." He puffed meditatively a moment, and added, "When you know who a greaser's friends are, these days, you quite frequently don't have to ask who are his enemies."

"I'll be here to see you make your start," the chief said. "What time?"

"About nine, I guess. It will be dark then. And in the meantime I'm going to write a little letter to Cap'n Williams—he's in charge of the Rangers down in that Eagle Pass country just now—and ask him to get busy looking Flores and Villabosa up. And I'd suggest that you"—he addressed Napier—"write your customs officers down there, or ask Lamb to, and see what they can gather along the same line."

"We could telegraph, or telephone."

"I wouldn't," Dalton advised. "It's quicker, but only one person knows what's in a letter—unless he tells it. It has to be done sometimes, but mentioning names over a wire isn't the most secret of indoor sports."

"I'll go over to the Federal Building and see

that a letter is sent right away, and be here at eight."

He pocketed the slip of paper with its Chinese lettering and hurried to carry out his errand. Lamb, who was still at his desk, signed the letter that he dictated, and he went downstairs and mailed it, after which, with nothing more to do and no desire to bother the collector, who was extremely busy, he wandered out on to the street. Gordon had not telephoned or otherwise reported.

Napier looked at his watch; it was not yet five o'clock. It was hardly likely Madame Frezzi would be at home, but he had a sudden impulse to see at least what sort of a house she lived in and where. He got a car and told the driver to take him to 311 Chiromoya Street.

CHAPTER XIV

THE automobile set him down, ten minutes later, before a good-sized residence in the edge of the Mexican quarter, and he went up the short walk to the door and rang the bell.

A dark-skinned maid responded. "Madame Frezzi?" he asked, and the girl looked puzzled and replied in Spanish, spoken too rapidly and with too much of a Mexican accent for him to understand. He had an inspiration, amended his inquiry to "*Señora* Frezzi," and gave the name the Spanish pronunciation instead of the Italian.

"*Si señor,*" the girl replied, and opened the door wider for his entrance. "*Espere usted un poco.*" She left him and disappeared up a flight of stairs. He gathered that she had indicated she would go to summon the señora and took a seat.

It was a very old house, but in fairly good repair and seemingly well furnished, so far as he could make out from his view of a broad parlor that opened out of the hall. He could see comfortable chairs, a piano, and too much bric-a-brac. The hall where he sat was wide and led completely through the house to the back, and a door that was partly open at the rear framed a glimpse

of what looked to be a good-sized yard, its foliage glistening green in the afternoon sun.

Madame Frezzi came down almost immediately, her hand cordially extended.

"I couldn't have dared hope you would come so soon," she said.

"And I was afraid you wouldn't be here, but you said 'always on Wednesdays' and this is Wednesday. The parade this afternoon didn't interest me, and I suddenly determined to look you up, although I realized you might be out seeing it."

"There is nothing picturesque in a trades' parade," she said. "I wouldn't be uncomfortable in a crowd for it. But Mrs. Bonillas—she is my relative here—is one who likes not to miss any detail of the Fiesta. I am sorry she is not at home; I would like you to meet her."

Throughout this brief interchange they had remained standing in the hall. Madame Frezzi now took a step toward the parlor at the side and then changed her mind. "Wouldn't it be nicer to sit out in the *patio?*" she asked. "It is such a lovely afternoon, and we can have tea out there." She led the way down the hall. "It isn't really a *patio* at all," she told him, over her shoulder. "It is only a yard. But it is quite pleasant. We spend a great deal of our time out here."

They passed through the door and into an enclosure, high walled at sides and back, that was surprisingly spacious. Land in that section of the city had not been especially valuable when

the house was built, and the lot was deep and wide, with many shade trees, vines and creepers to contrast their color with the gray stone—or perhaps adobe—of the wall, and flowers and blooming shrubs, profusely scattered, with pomegranates, poppies and roses already in bloom.

There were two or three little tables under the trees, and she led the way to one of them, after having called a command in melodious Spanish to some one in the house, who replied, "*Si, señora.*"

"Delightful!" he exclaimed, as they took seats. "One could never imagine, from the street, that you had so pleasant a retreat back here."

"The Mexicans are like the Spaniards—and unlike you Americans, if you won't take offense, which you won't, because you are too well-traveled. They do not like to live their lives in public."

The dark servant came out with tea and little cakes, and Madame Frezzi poured while they chatted of inconsequential things,—of some of the people who had been present when they met in Paris; of how Paris must have changed, in some respects, and naturally, of how Madame Frezzi liked America.

"You didn't tell me where you make your home," he said.

"A little way outside New York, on Long Island," she told him. "I have a little house there, near enough to town to get in and out

easily, and far enough away to be quiet—and not demand every cent of my income for rent. When you are back in New York, I hope you will be able to come down and see me some time."

He expressed the pleasure it would give him.

"And you? I suppose you live close to the city, so as to be near your business."

"In the city," he said. "At a club."

"But your business doesn't hold you in an office like most men's, I imagine. You travel a great deal, naturally. What are you poor importers doing these days, when there are neither ships to bring the goods nor passports for the agents who go up and down the earth buying them?"

He answered that business had indeed been bad for lo! these several years, but, as he talked, lightly describing the depleted condition of most importers' warerooms, he reflected on the fact that twice he had met Madame Frezzi that day, and each time his business had been one of the earliest things to be discussed, although, at noon, she had not introduced the subject. And neither Italians nor Spaniards nor European ladies of any other blood, concerned principally with affairs of state and politics, are prone to discuss commercial matters at all. That message, Monday night, had said his business would be benefited if he would respond to it.

"Shall you remain in San Antonio after the Fiesta?" he asked, "or are you here only for the week?"

"Oh, I haven't just arrived," she said. "I have been here more than a fortnight. I timed my visit to include Fiesta Week, of course, but I wouldn't have felt like making my cousin a little, fly-by-night visit like that. It would have looked as though I only wanted to see the carnival and had made her my excuse. As to going, I haven't made up my mind. It may be next week. I may stay two or three weeks longer. How long are you planning to be here?"

He implied in his answer that he was on a vacation and had some thought of extending it to the Pacific coast, although he might decide to spend the whole outing in Texas.

"I was mighty sorry not to accept Mr. Sastanada's invitation to take lunch with you," he said, after a little. "Seems like a mighty nice chap, Sastanada."

This lead might have induced her to tell him something about her amiable luncheon companion, but it didn't. "It was too bad you had to run away," was her reply. "Did you find your friend at the St. Francis, as you hoped?"

"It was a good guess. Can you understand how a hotel clerk can get a message over the telephone, making an appointment for the St. Francis, and deliver it as being the Plaza?"

He took some more tea and spoke highly of the little cakes. Then he said, idly:

"I had a notion, when I saw you in the crowd, Monday night, to come back and try to find you. As a matter of fact, I did start back, but the

jam was too great. I had been in town three days, and yours was the first face I had seen that I knew. There is no place quite so lonely as a crowd."

She smiled at the bromide as flatteringly as though it were new. "You would have met some very pleasant people if you had found us," she said, "and we had a good place to see the king's ceremonies. It is an interesting thing, the way Americans, who insist they don't like kings and queens at all, like to play at bowing down to royalty."

"Some pretty conservative monarchies are only playing at it, these days," he laughed. "There is more than one bona fide king, I fancy, who would be glad to have his throne guaranteed for as long as this San Antonio's king's reign. That fellow with the crown, the ermine-trimmed mantle and the look of pained embarrassment Monday night, is sure of his job for a whole week."

She spoke kindly of George, Victor Emanuel and Alfonso. "What I enjoy about these carnivals," she said, "is not the processions and coronations; they aren't very thrilling to one who has seen the real thing. It is the spirit of the crowds. You were speaking about it at lunch to-day. Were you in New York on armistice night?"

"No."

"If you had been, you would never cease to note the difference in these Latin crowds—or,

rather, crowds in places that have a deep strain of Latin blood and tradition. New York had the crowd, the noise, and far more cause to be merry than these people have here, this week. It had everything—except the carnival spirit. And it was as different from this as though the people came from two worlds."

Adroitly, she had succeeded in leading the conversation a long way, he thought, from Monday evening and his desire to see her again.

He brought it back: "I tried to find you later, that night, but was unable to."

There was no emphasis to give his words significance, but he looked into her face as he said it, alert for some expression that would show she understood. "The woman who smiled," Puenta had said, and Madame Frezzi could not know that this, to Napier, had been cryptic. She could not possibly be aware that two women had smiled at him that evening.

"It was all we could do to get home, the crowds were so thick," she said, and went on with an account of how the automobile in which she rode stalled for an incredible period at one of the corners. He was disappointed. Not by the slightest flicker of an eyelash had she indicated that his words had any more meaning for her than they purported to have.

The Mexican girl came out and spoke a few words in Spanish.

"Will you excuse me a moment?" Madame Frezzi asked. "I am called to the telephone."

While she was gone he moved about the yard. The high walls were of adobe, as he had guessed. There was a shrub whose name he did not know and a tree that was quite unfamiliar; he thought he would ask her their names when she came out.

But when she came, he ceased to be interested in shrubs and trees. Something had occurred to agitate his hostess violently, and her emotion was not sorrow, but anger. She was making a strong effort to hold herself in hand, but her bosom was heaving, her voice quivered perceptibly, and there was a flash in her eye that boded no comfort for the person or thing which had enraged her, if that object happened to be near at hand while she was still in her present mood. Not enough time had elapsed for her to have participated in any quarrel, either over a telephone or directly. There was but one other probable answer. Some one had telephoned disturbing news.

Ordinarily, as she had recently demonstrated—or so he believed—Madame Frezzi was able to dissemble cleverly. But perhaps, when she was under the stress of such passion as now swayed her, with her emotions near to the surface, her real thoughts would not be so easily hidden. As she resumed their interrupted conversation, trying to speak as lightly as before and plainly striving both to gain mastery over herself and keep him from observing her excitement, he suddenly determined upon an action that until that moment he had not planned at all.

"It is certainly a beautiful near-*patio*," he

said, " with all the atmosphere of a home in Spain or Mexico. Even the romantic looking door in the gray wall, where the hero can slip out, or the villain in, without being seen from the front."

He opened the narrow door, took one step through it—and stood on the spot where Angel Puenta died.

Instantly he turned, stepped back, closed the door, and looked down, unsmiling, into Madame Frezzi's eyes.

" Your messenger did his best to bring me here, but he met with a serious accident, as you know," he said. " You had better tell me about it."

CHAPTER XV

"WHAT messenger?" she repeated. "I do not understand." But her hand was at her throat, and in her eyes was startled apprehension.

"We had better sit down," Napier told her. She sank into her chair, and he took the seat opposite. His eyes, since his question, had not left her face. "He was killed at your gate. Why?"

"How should I know?" she replied. "And why do you call him my messenger?" Very desperately she was trying to regain her usual poise, but without success, and her eyes fell under his grave gaze. "You mean that Mexican, of course. He was no messenger of mine."

"You did not know him?"

"No," she declared, and then caught her breath and bit her lip. Perhaps it would be an easy thing to discover that she did. "That is—I mean I did not know much about him. I had seen him working around here."

"He worked here?"

"Not—not exactly. He came here on work—doing errands, or something like that."

"For whom?"

Clearly she felt she must, if possible, counter this cross-examination. "How should I know?"

she asked. "And why should you ask me these things? A man was murdered in the alley beyond our wall. What should I know about it?"

"That is what I am asking."

"Nothing, except what I saw in the newspaper. Somebody found him dead. It said he had been stabbed."

"And you, I suppose, were in the house."

"Yes."

"Then who was going to unlock this gate for him?"

Again she tried to shift the questioning. "Do you mean to say he was coming here?"

"He hadn't said. But he gave me your message. If you were here ——" He left the sentence significantly suspended.

"My message?" She hesitated, and Napier sensed in her voice a note of indecision. There was no way by which she could know whether or not Puenta had given him the name of the one who sent him. "You say he brought you a message?"

Napier refused to let her become the examiner. "You haven't told me who was going to open the gate," he insisted.

"How do I know any one was?"

"Did any one else want to see me besides you?"

Her hands, on the table before her, were clasped, and the ends of her nails were white with their tension. She tried to smile naturally. "But you still seem to be taking it for granted

your message came from me, when I have told you it did not. That is not very complimentary, Mr. Napier."

"Where were you when I discovered his body?" Napier demanded. He was surprised at the real astonishment with which she cried, "You! Was it you who found him?"

He nodded. "Where were you?" he repeated.

"If it was around twelve o'clock I must have been ——"

He interrupted her impatiently. "There is no use our going on this way, Madame Frezzi. I propose to know. I don't want to have to go to the police with this, but if you do not tell me ——"

She broke in sharply. "Do you mean you would not go to the police if you knew?"

"It would depend on what I knew. Perhaps."

She leaned forward, speaking rapidly, eagerly. "If you were certain I had no responsibility in regard to it at all—if you were convinced I knew nothing whatever about who did it or why it was done—neither I nor anybody in the house—would you promise not to tell the police?" She seemed to feel this outburst called for explanation. "They are blockheads. They do not use reason. American police and European police, they are all alike. They believe everybody to be guilty."

"If you were to tell me," Napier said quietly,

She broke in sharply. "Do you mean you would not go to the police if you knew?" *Page 170.*

but without withdrawing his eyes from her face, "if you were to tell me all you know about this Puenta and how he was killed, and if I were absolutely convinced that neither you nor anybody in this house were really concerned in it at all, and that the ends of justice did not require that you should be brought into it, I do not see why it would be necessary to go to the police. If you are satisfied with those qualifications, I promise."

"I am," she said promptly. She laughed, a little shakily to be sure, but with a certain air of triumph. "Isn't it unusual," she asked, "for a citizen who has become so interested in a crime as you have in this one to think perhaps he can work it out all by himself without the help of the police—while he is on a holiday?" Mockery was in her eyes and her voice. "You are allowing yourself to get out of character, Mr. Napier, and I had about made up my mind you never did. I am a little surprised at you."

It was his turn to parrot words. "Out of character?"

"We might as well speak frankly, because I don't want you to think I would be such a fool as to trust every well-mannered Oriental importer that I might meet for the fourth time in my life not to run straight to police headquarters, promise or no promise. I am trusting you because I am quite aware of your reputation for not confusing the innocent with the guilty—and your very wide experience."

He wisely remained silent.

"In Paris, the first time we met," she told him, "I was given quite elaborate details as to your profession and some of your major successes, by an American who knew."

He hoped he was concealing his inner feelings. So she *had* been amusing herself by her questions about his business.

"You prefer not to admit any connection with the government, eh?" she said, as he did not answer. "Well, I will not hold that against you. It isn't done, I suppose."

She became serious again, but with her temporary shift from defense to attack (able tactics, Napier admiringly admitted to himself), she had gained self-control, and when she went on her poise was almost normal. "I am going to tell you, now, exactly what happened Monday night, so far as I can. I shall show you that I really know almost nothing about the murder, and then I shall leave myself in your hands. You will not, I am sure, forget your promise."

Napier bowed gravely, and she continued:

"I was waiting for him to come, sitting very quietly, right here where I am sitting now. I had told him to be here at twelve o'clock, whether he found you or not; I did not want to be out here later than that. As he came through the alley he was to whistle, very softly, four notes, and then he was to knock four times on the door, and I would open it. I heard his steps, and then the whistle—there were only the footsteps of one, and I supposed he was alone." She looked in-

quiringly at Napier, and he said, " I was some distance behind; he asked me not to walk with him."

" Yes," she nodded. " Naturally, but I supposed you would have joined him outside the alley. I did not think there was any danger of his being observed after you got this far; I supposed he would wait out there in the street for you to come up. When only one came, I was sure he hadn't found you." She smiled a little as she added, " If I had known you were the one who found his body, what an idiot I would have been to give you my address, this noon, and ask you to call."

" I wondered about that," he admitted.

" The paper said, ' The body was discovered by a passing pedestrian.' I didn't know how long afterward it was; the paper didn't say."

He nodded understanding, and waited for her to go on.

" He whistled," she said. " Four notes. And I got up and went quietly to the gate, waiting for the four knocks. He never gave them."

Her face reflected some of the emotions of the night.

" His footsteps had not quite reached the door, although they were very near—he was already stopping—when I heard a different sound. It was the movement of some one else, not loud, and at the same instant a blow. Then there was a groan and a fall. I shrank back by the door, holding my breath. For a second or two there

was no sound at all, and then came a rustling, dragging noise. I think he was moving the body. And then something fell in the yard, right there by the pomegranate bush behind you. There was another groan and more rustling—but only a little. Then the murderer set out toward the other end of the alley. He ran at first, but as he got toward the end I think he walked. Before that I had slipped over to the pomegranate bush and was groping around for what he had thrown over the wall." She had difficulty in repressing a shudder. "It was a knife—wet."

She paused a moment. "Wet," she repeated. "On my hands, and a little on my dress, and I had sent him on the errand. How would it look to the police? And there was another matter. No one in the house knew I was out here, and I could not explain to them why I was not in bed, as they thought. So —— I hid the knife, as quickly as ever I could, and hurried into the house and up to my room, and nobody saw or heard me. Then I went to the bathroom and washed my hands, and the stain on my dress. Nobody suspected I had been out here." She stopped. "And that is all I know about it. On my word of honor."

Napier, his eyes fixed on her face throughout the recital, believed she had spoken the exact truth.

"And the knife?" he asked.

"There was no use trying to bury it," she said. "This ground is too hard, and, anyway, there

wasn't time. So I ——" She moved her head, indicating a point above him. "I hid it in this tree that we are sitting under. If you were to stand on a chair, as I did, you could reach it."

The tree was a chinaberry, its foliage quite impenetrable to the eye. "I stood on a chair, and drove the point into a crutch of the tree, between two branches," she said. "I have not seen it since."

"Then it is still there?" he queried, without looking toward it.

"I suppose so. If it had been found, I would surely have heard of it. People in the house said the police were in the yard, later that night, with flashlights, but they searched on the ground. I did not hear or see them. Either I was in the bathroom, getting rid of the stains, or I had gone to bed. Do you wonder, with that knife to explain, and the fact that he was coming here, that I did not want my story to be juggled and blundered over by the police?"

"How many people are in the house at this moment?" Napier asked.

"Unless some one has just come in, no one but the servant you saw. The other one was given an afternoon off to see the parade, and everybody who lives here is out—or was, a few moments ago."

"I am going to put this chair on the other side of the tree trunk and get the knife," he told her. "I think they cannot see from the house, even if some one has come home and happens to be look-

ing, but I suggest you walk about a bit with me and describe some of the vegetation. That tree over there, for instance. What is it?"

While she played the part he had outlined, he moved about with her. They came, after a while, to the chinaberry tree again. "I never saw thicker foliage," he remarked, looking up into it openly. "Are the branches extraordinarily thick and close together, or is it entirely the leaves that cause the effect?" He shifted the chair, stood upon it and parted the foliage to see for himself, the upper third of his body hidden in the leaves. "Perfectly explainable, if any one is watching, on the ground of my deep interest in unfamiliar trees and shrubs," he said evenly, as he stepped down and replaced the chair by the table. "Now tell me about that bush over by this side wall." He led the way in that direction.

"The knife?" she whispered.

"In my breast pocket. There was a rather heavy thunder storm very early yesterday morning."

"You mean ——"

"It seems to be washed clean. That undoubtedly means there are no finger prints left on it—including yours."

She sighed with relief.

"You don't know how glad I am it is gone from the tree. They might have decided to trim the branches. Well, do you believe I have told you the truth? Is it necessary for you to tell—anybody? You see, I really could not help the

police at all. The only aid I could have been to them at any time was to give them the knife, and now you have it. But they would never have believed that I did not know more than I do. Police never believe anything that doesn't prove somebody guilty."

"You haven't told me what you know about Puenta. How did you come to select him for a messenger?"

"He came here on an errand and I spoke to him as he was leaving, and offered to pay him for finding you. I know very little about him; I had seen him here once or twice, that is all."

"Who had he come to see? That night, I mean."

"I don't know. I saw him as he was coming out. This is a sort of hotel, you know, and I do not know everybody in it very well. I did not ask him who he had come to see. I merely knew he was a sort of errand boy in the neighborhood here. If he could bring a message to others, perhaps he would take one for me. I have no doubt the police know more about him than I do; they wouldn't need to ask me about him at all." He felt sure she had not told him all she knew about Puenta, and surmised that she would not if she could avoid it. She quite obviously wanted to get away from the subject of the little Mexican's personality and played a card (again he admired her cleverness) which she had been saving for a moment like this.

"When we made our little bargain," she said,

" you didn't make it a condition that I shouldn't tell any one who you really are, because, at that minute, you didn't know I knew. Now that I have told you all about it, I am going to give you good measure, to prove—how is it you Americans say it?—to prove that my heart is in the right place. I am going to promise not to say who you are to a soul."

" How many people know it already? " he asked.

" None, so far as I know."

" You didn't happen to mention it to the friends you were on the plaza with when I drove by, the other night, or to Sastanada, this noon? "

" I have spoken of it to no one. Oh, I suppose it would have been the most natural thing in the world, if I were a talkative, gossipy person, for me to have leaned over to whoever was nearest to me and said, ' Do you see that nice-looking man who bowed to me? That is Napier, of the United States Treasury Department. He is a great smuggler-catcher.' But I didn't. I have found out it is just as well not to tell all one knows. A few secrets, just for oneself, are good to keep."

"And that matter of not telling all one knows," Napier remarked pleasantly, " brings us to the subject of what it was you wanted to see me about Monday night."

She hesitated. " It wasn't at all an important thing," she said. " Just a thing that came into my mind that I thought I would tell you. I am

very impulsive sometimes. It wasn't important at all. If you don't mind, I would like to leave that out."

"But I am afraid I do mind. Our bargain was that you were to tell me the whole story."

"It had no bearing whatever on his death," she said. She stood in thought, weighing, it seemed to him, arguments for and against frankness. He believed, at one moment, that she had about decided either to decline flatly or to invent a plausible substitute for the truth. Then, as she meditated, her eyes narrowed slightly and there came into her face an expression faintly reminiscent of the passion that had marred it when she returned from the telephone.

"It was a sudden impulse," she said. "I don't often act on impulse, but that night I saw you, and remembered your work, and wondered what you were doing here in San Antonio. And I happened, quite by accident, to have heard a whisper as to a violation of your customs laws. I cannot tell you how I heard it. I mean I will not tell, because that would bring friends into it, who mentioned it merely in the way of gossip and oughtn't to be dragged in. It was about some people who are interested in smuggling opium. So, just because you would like to know, and—and you looked friendly and reminded me of old times when I saw you—I thought I would get you word."

Napier felt positive of two things as he watched her face. One was that she was speak-

ing the truth when she said she had sent for him to give him the information she outlined; the other was that the lame explanation she was giving of *why* she was going to give it to him was absolutely false.

"You can tell me now," he said.

"I will," she decided. "But I cannot tell you more than the bare fact without letting you know how I came to hear it, and that would involve others. So I shall not say a word further than to tell you who the people are, and you will be able to get the evidence easily enough, yourself. If I am not mistaken, a search ——"

"Yes?" he encouraged her, thinking of Kalat and the Chinamen at "the great house."

"The man is a retired officer of the United States army. He lives at a little hotel called the Edgemont, and his name is Captain Glenn."

Napier masked his surprise. "You said 'people,'" he reminded her. "Who else?"

"He has a daughter," she told him.

With this he had to be content. She would not answer another question.

CHAPTER XVI

BACK in his hotel room, Napier took the knife out of his pocket and examined it carefully. It was a nasty looking weapon, with a thin, keen blade, but there was nothing especially distinctive about it. A Mexican might have owned it, or a Chinaman, or a Sicilian, or any other national, for that matter, whose preference in weapons was for edged ones. He put it away carefully and went down to dinner, after which he was at police headquarters in time to see Villabosa start on his unwilling journey.

Captain Dalton was accompanied by Ranger Hard, a young man who, twenty years hence, if he survived the wear and tear of his profession so long, would be of a similar type to Dalton. Hard bore out, in the presence of Villabosa, the mention that Dalton had made of his probable dissatisfaction at being called upon to leave San Antonio and a girl—a condition of mind that would not make him friendly toward the prisoner who had forced him to make the trip—but he grumbled as to the errand only once, and then apparently not at all for Villabosa's benefit. Before the Mexican had been brought into the office, however, Napier had not observed that

Hard was suffering from any lowness of spirits; if he had a girl in San Antonio he did not seem to be in despair at leaving her; in fact, it did not seem far-fetched from his manner and comment to judge that he rather fancied the work the captain and he were about to undertake. "Don't you worry," he said, in a brief burst of confidence to the treasury agent, his head jerking in Dalton's direction with his emphasized word, "*He'll* have him eating out of our hands before he gets finished. Leave 'em to Cap'n Bob!"

Villabosa entered the back seat of the automobile, unostentatiously, at a rear entrance to the station, and Hard sat beside him. Dalton climbed in behind the wheel, spoke a cheery good night to the chief and Napier, standing at the curb, and let in his clutch. Napier did not see the other car after it turned the near-by corner, but he knew that if Villabosa were to see any of his friends as they passed toward the outskirts of town, he would not wave or shout to them. For most excellent and binding reasons.

He had some time on his hands before keeping an appointment, made the evening previous, at the little grocery of Kwong Yet, and he went back to the Bonham and up to his room. There, well pleased with a day's work well completed, Gordon came to him at ten o'clock, just as he was thinking of starting for the Chinese quarter.

"Another man has relieved me—Carver," he said, "although I doubt if he will have anything to do. However, if our friend moves out of his

house for any late calls, he'll be there to trail along and see what's doing. I had a satisfactory afternoon and evening. Not exciting; merely satisfactory."

"No trouble keeping track of him, eh?"

"I had an uneasy time for a while, following him in an automobile; that's always risky, at the distance you have to keep in broad daylight. But I got along all right, and he didn't get wise to being followed."

"What did he do?"

"Had a mighty pleasant afternoon, if my judgment is any good. I'll tell it in detail:

"First, when he came out of the Plaza, he and the fine-looking woman he was with went down the street a block to the entrance of a department store, and she went in. He walked off as if he didn't have any place in particular to go; just sauntered up the street, smoking. When he came to Main Plaza, he drifted into the crowd and listened to the ballyhoos. Watched the folks around the cane boards and the other games. Went into two of the shows. In other words, gave a mighty correct imitation of a man with nothing on his mind but a willingness to be entertained by the carnival. He kept this up for two hours. Once in a while he looked at his watch. Plain to see he had an appointment later.

"At about half-past three he hired an automobile—one of those public so-much-an-hour cars on the plaza. I was lucky; I knew the driver

of another car that stood along there, and knew he could be depended on to use a reasonable degree of horse sense in following, so I hired him. Our friend went to a little hotel over here on the north side of town called the Edgemont. It's a little family place."

"I know where it is," Napier said.

"He was gone in there twenty minutes. When he came out he had a girl with him—a mighty pretty girl, a good deal younger than the other. Her name is Glenn; I found that out later. They got into the car and took a ride. Went around the North Loop and when they got to Brackenridge Park, on the way back, they turned in there. Drove around slowly in the park, looking at the scenery. Stopped, finally, at the Japanese tea garden. Went in and had tea. So did I.

"Mr. Kalat is a very fascinating gentleman with the ladies, I should say, and he was doing his best to please. Everything was fine and dandy until a couple came in and passed his table. Mexican couple, a man and a woman. They bowed to Kalat and passed on, but he was disturbed about it. It didn't appear why. Perhaps because they saw him with the young lady; at least, that looked plausible. Is this Kalat married?"

"If he is, it isn't likely his wife is where she could hear about it."

"The Mexican couple—nice, high-class looking people, they were—went over to a table in

the further corner from Kalat, and the woman left the man after they had given their orders and came over to the telephone. The 'phone happened to be right near where I was sitting. I don't know whether what she said has any bearing on the case or not, but as long as she mentioned his name—that phony name that you told me this noon he was going under—it is worth repeating, perhaps.

" She called a number, and asked—in Spanish, you understand; I speak it pretty well—if Señora Bonillas could come to the 'phone. Then she asked who *was* there. Then she said, 'All right. Will you ask her to come, please.' After a bit she began to explain to somebody that she and her husband had decided not to come home to dinner, and would whoever it was on the other end of the line tell Señora Bonillas, so she wouldn't expect them. She said she didn't dare trust any message to that fool of a servant. And she said—there was something malicious about this, although she said it sweetly enough, or I don't know one single thing about women—she said, ' Who do you suppose I ran into in the tea room? Señor Sastanada. And the *prettiest* girl! Ramon '—I suppose Ramon was this woman's husband—' was so envious he would hardly look at me all the time we were having our tea. She was —— Why, how stupid I am! It never occurred to me until this minute. It was the same girl he was riding with Monday night, when he left her to join us just before the

parade came along. You'll tell Señora Bonillas not to expect us for dinner, won't you? *Gracias.*'

"Well, about that time Mr. Kalat and Miss Glenn left, and I trailed along. They rode around in the park a little more, and then came into town and went to the Edgemont. After a while Kalat came out, paid off the chauffeur, and went back. He had dinner there, at seven, with Miss Glenn and her father. I got the names from a friend of mine behind the desk while they were eating. After dinner he went upstairs with them, to their rooms, I suppose. He came down at nine-fifteen, ordered a car by 'phone, and went home. By now, I reckon, he is tucked up nice and comfy for the night. I'll relieve Carver again in the morning."

"Where is this house where he is all tucked up for the night?" Napier asked.

"It's a sort of cross between a hotel and a high-grade boarding-house run by this Señora Bonillas I heard the conversation about. In the better part of the Mexican quarter. Respectable enough, in a way, but the Mexicans who stop there do not expect their fellow guests to pry too much into their business. Just the place to suit a man who did not want to answer many questions. It's at 311 Chiromoya Street."

CHAPTER XVII

No one sat on the front gallery of the little grocery store as Napier approached, and the one-string fiddle was silent. Except for a pencil of light from a closed and curtained window at the rear, the building was in darkness, but the front door opened instantly to his guarded tap, and Kwong Yet motioned (first quickly closing and securing the door) for him to pass on to the living room at the back. Old Kwong Li met him there with a greeting that fulfilled the requirements of simple etiquette, and invited him to take the seat of honor on the west side of the room, but did not seem to consider it necessary to go further into ceremony, a gratifying decision.

The young Chinaman filled tobacco pipes and presented them to his uncle and the guest. Old Kwong smoked a moment and then came to the object of Napier's call with unusual directness.

"This day, since noon, I have tended the grocery," he said, adding complacently, "I have not forgotten how to trade profitably. While I was here, Kwong Yet has been taking a holiday. You will tell him, Kwong Yet."

"All the afternoon and all the evening, until ten o'clock, I have been at places where fan-tan

is played," Yet obeyed. "I have gambled much money."

"It would not be the part of a friend for me not to reimburse you for the losses, seeing they were made on my errand," Napier said.

"There were no losses," Kwong Yet told him simply. "On the contrary. So the day passed until well into the evening, and I had not met any man who would be valuable to me. Then I fell in with one who is of the Society of the Fragrant Lily, whose losses had been considerable and whose head was muddled with the fumes of poppy. I loaned him a little money when his was gone, and afterward I went home with him and smoked tobacco while he had a pipe of opium. Three pills. He did not realize how much he told me; I was able to make him think I already knew."

The young Chinaman paused a moment and went on, as evenly as before:

"If he remembers all he told me, and asks those in authority whether it was right for him to speak of it, I think my days draw toward their end. However ——"

"'If a man in the morning hear the right way, he may die in the evening without regret,'" quoted old Kwong from the sayings of the Master.

"However," Kwong Yet went on, after a respectful wait to make sure his uncle had finished speaking, "I do not think he will remember, and if he does I think he will be more afraid to

tell than not to tell. What sentence would be passed on me, for knowing, would hardly be less than that passed upon him for talking. No, I think he will not speak of the matter."

Napier waited in patience.

"As to the great house," Kwong Yet proceeded, " it is, as you thought, the headquarters of those who deal in bitter cargoes. Ng Choy, who goes here under the name of Charles Toy, is the master of those who are of our people, but there are said to be white men who are chief above him. My drowsy-headed friend does not know who they are. He does not even know whether they live here in San Antonio or elsewhere. They could be in Mexico, or near the border."

Again old Kwong quoted, this time from the Book of Poetry:

" ' In hewing an axe-handle, the pattern is not far off.' "

" I think likely that is so," his nephew agreed. " So I asked what white men came to the house. There are three. My friend did not know the names of any of them. He might have heard them, he said, but he could not be expected to remember, because they are barbarous." Kwong Yet inclined his head deferentially toward Napier, as though to say, " You understand my meaning of ' barbarous ' is merely ' unpronounceable.' "

" Did he describe the white men?" Napier asked.

" Somewhat. Two are Mexicans, he thinks.

Of these one is round and very black of hair. The other is older, somewhat gray, and has been sick at some time of the demon's breath so that there are marks on each side of his nose. The third man who comes is an American. He is tall, and thin, and old. My friend has heard that he was once in the American army."

"Which of them seems to be chief?"

"The smoking one did not know. He did not even know that they are concerned in the matter, except that they come to the house to see Ng Choy. One other thing, however, he was more positive about. You asked me to learn about the kind and quality of the bitter cargoes. My friend is very sure they are not concerned with anything but opium. If there were diamonds, such as you mentioned, or other things except opium, he would know, he said. He told me there is a strict accounting among the members for the profits—large shares for the leaders; small shares for the lesser ones; but an accounting, with an exact division. The opium comes to the big house, but he does not know where it is kept before it is sold. It may leave there for some better hiding place very soon after its arrival. It is brought by a messenger from near the Mexican border."

"You mean from the other side?"

"From this side. The messenger who brings it to San Antonio does not know how it comes across the river, and no one but the chiefs and the messenger himself know from whom he re-

ceives it on this side; that is a secret from the ordinary members. The messenger departs from here and returns, with ten or twenty or thirty cans, as the case may be. It is not known that those cans come across the river all at one time. Perhaps they are gathered together in small lots, one and two and three coming in at one time and one and two and three coming in at another, until there is sufficient on hand for the messenger to be sent. As to this my talkative friend does not know; he says none of the lesser ones know. Just at this moment, unless one has been selected within a day, there is no messenger to go to the border for the supply. And that brings us to your matter of a Mexican who was killed. He was the messenger. And he did not keep his lips locked."

"How did they know? Had your opium-smoking friend heard?"

"He knew *when* they heard, and where. Joe Fong, he who is half Chinese and half Mexican, spoke over the telephone at the restaurant of Ng Choy. Then he came hastily and called for three men who are waiters there and who belong to the society. He went with them, making four, and it is said there were two more—from the great house, perhaps. There were six ways the Mexican might approach, and they spread to meet him by whatever road he came. I do not know which one was chosen by heaven to strike. Is it of any importance? Whichever one met him was a proper executioner. He had been a

traitor to the tong that trusted him, so he went speedily to join the departed." This, quite obviously, was to Kwong Yet's mind exactly as it should be.

"It is of importance," Napier said.

"Then I will inquire into it further." The promise was made courteously and sincerely; far be it from him, the young Chinaman's manner said, to attempt to delve into the workings of a white official's brain. Napier, with his knowledge of China and Chinese, ought to understand that this execution had been quite regular, and probably did, but he was bound by the laws of America, which are usually unreasonable and not at all to be comprehended.

"It is of importance, also, to learn if the opium is kept at the great house, or, if not, where," Napier went on. "You know, of course, that I would seize it. It would not do to search a place where it was not, for they would be warned."

"I will try to learn as to that, too. I regret I have failed to find out all you wished. I am slow and dull."

"You are rapid and alert," Napier amended, making the reply that politeness required to his purely rhetorical deprecation. "Yet I would know a little more, and I will come again tomorrow night at this hour, or the night after, if I may."

"Is it not your house?" protested old Kwong. "Shall a man ask permission to come into his own?"

"One thing more. You named three white men who come to the house of Ng Choy. Did he who smoked and talked speak of any white women?"

"None." Kwong Yet had an opinion as to this and expressed it. "Ng Choy is a wise man. He would not trust such a matter as this to the discretion of any woman."

"But the white men might," the older Chinaman said. And Kwong Yet, again reminded of the incomprehensible ways of barbarian peoples, inclined his head and replied, "I did not think of that. It is true."

Napier produced the weapon that Madame Frezzi had hidden in the tree and laid it on the table. "There is the knife that killed the messenger," he said. "Does it tell you any story?"

Both the others examined it dispassionately. "It means nothing to me," the older one said. "It is certainly not of any unusual make or pattern. I have seen fifty knives near enough like it to have been fashioned the same day by the same hand."

"I myself have one almost like it and another that does not differ except as to the thickness of the blade," Kwong Yet added. "I think you will not trace it to its owner."

"All the more need for you to make inquiry," Napier remarked, as he wrapped the weapon again and restored it to his pocket. "It is needful that I know who handled it."

"Six there were," said old Kwong Li, thought-

fully. "It could have been any one of the six. But I shall burn scented sticks to-night before the spirits of those who sit honorably on high, to the end that it shall prove to be that sneering-faced, loud-mouthed son of disgraced ancestors who jibed at my years and my music, and caused me to lose face with my neighbors if any heard." He spoke regretfully. "If one of the other five did the killing I shall be sorry, although he is no clansman of mine, because you will punish him under your laws, and he has only done a just thing. But if Joe Fong did it I shall be glad, because he is an incumbrance on the flatness of the earth, and it would be better if his breath and his body occupied separate places."

The old man shrewdly realized whither this outburst might lead in Napier's mind, and he rose to his feet with hand extended.

"Notwithstanding which," he said gravely, "I will strike palms with you and promise by my forbears whom I honor that the name that shall be given to you by Kwong Yet or by me shall be the true one, whether it be the name of Joe Fong or another."

Napier's palm met his, and the younger Chinaman also stretched forth his hand. "As my uncle, so also do I promise," he said. Whereupon Napier, who for a moment had been uneasy in his mind regarding the value of their prospective information, knew that Fong was safe from the punishment of the law unless he had really been the murderer. Whether he was

safe from Kwong Li and his brother's son was quite another matter and one outside his responsibility or concern.

He returned to the Bonham and found a long cipher telegram in his box from his chief in Washington. Decoding it was a long but interesting occupation, as the information it contained grew slowly under his pencil. As finally translated, it read:

Paris has secured information you asked regarding Madame Lucia Frezzi through French Intelligence Department. Her nationality is not positively known, but believed to be Greek, although while in France she claimed Italian allegiance. Prior to the war she resided principally in Paris, supposed by the French to be engaged in lesser diplomatic espionage work in behalf of Italy. When Italy joined the allies, inquiries regarding Frezzi were made at Rome which developed the information (Italy having in some manner become aware of her true allegiance) that she had never been in the Italian service but was employed by Turkey. She was probably aware of this investigation, for she crossed to Spain before the French could arrest her.

Madrid informs us she remained in Spain a short time and then sailed for New York. Passport showed Spanish nationality. She has since resided in and near New York, with a few visits to Washington. Has not

been under espionage, of course. Regret this is the limit of our information.

Have been able to get the following additional data concerning Captain Glenn:

From former army associates, confidential, we learn that he was requested to resign from army because he had become an opium addict. When under influence, he associated with Chinese. There was nothing against him except this habit and he was allowed to quit with a clear record. From Cleveland we learn he has taken treatment two or three times in attempt to break the habit, without permanent results, and that he is believed to have gone South because of supposed greater ease in procuring drug near the border.

Relative to Frezzi report, it is at least interesting to remember that during all the period while she was employed by Turkey at Paris, the Ottoman government was controlled by the party to which Kalat belonged, and that he had charge of many of its espionage activities.

CHAPTER XVIII

DALTON'S car had gone five miles or more beyond the city limits when the captain looked over his shoulder and addressed Ranger Hard:

"You might take that gag out now, I reckon. Better leave the cuffs on; they won't give him no discomfort to speak of. If, when we are going through any village or passing another car, or anything, he takes a notion to yawp, bend a pistol-barrel against the side of his head."

"I shore will," Hard promised grimly, as he removed the impediment to Villabosa's speech. His voice and manner implied that he was still thinking of the girl he had been forced to leave behind in San Antonio.

Villabosa did not "yawp." He sat perfectly quiet in the corner of the covered car and took no chances. After a time he dozed, and finally he slept. All night the car drove ahead, most of the time over roads that were far from being state highways. The sun had risen when they turned off toward a small farmhouse that stood well back from the road,—Dalton's little property in San Miguel County.

A youngish, red-haired, competent looking man came out of the house and awaited the stopping of the car by the gallery. He said,

"Mawnin', cap'n," quite as though Dalton were in the habit of appearing at this hour, nodded to Hard, and eyed Villabosa as the captain ordered him to the ground. Dalton got out himself and took off the prisoner's handcuffs.

"Gentleman I've brought to stay with us a few days—maybe more an' maybe less, depending," he explained. "I reckon, if you don't mind, we'd all like a little breakfast. After that, Hard and me need some sleep. Prob'ly our friend does, too. However, it wouldn't be fitten for *everybody* to sleep all at once. You wasn't doing anything that would prevent you keeping an eye on him while we catch up a little, was you, Jim?"

"Nothing a-tall, cap'n," the farmer replied. "Me, I went to bed with the little birds and got up with the same, and I ain't got nothing important on my mind to-day a-tall." He entered the house and began to prepare a second breakfast. Villabosa chafed his wrists gently and gloomed in silence. Except when addressed, which had been only two or three times, he had not spoken all night.

"Mr. Manning here will look out for you," Dalton told him crisply, when they had eaten. "You can take that cot-bed in that front room there and sleep as long as you want to. If you want to move around any, ask him. It won't be healthy to try it otherwise. Jim, I want to talk to you outside."

They were gone five minutes, while Ranger

Hard smoked a cigarette and yawned mightily. When they came in, Manning went through into another room and came back with a pistol in its holster hanging from his belt. Villabosa's lip curled.

"If you think I am going to try to get away," he sneered at Dalton, "you are mistaken. No. That would be playing your game. 'Shot while trying to escape.' No, thank you. If you murder me you will do it in cold blood. I shall not give you the excuse."

"You're safer thataway," Dalton commented dryly. He and Hard went into the back room, whence, very soon, came sounds of their slumber. Villabosa, stretched on the cot the captain had pointed out, also slept. Only Jim Manning remained awake, sitting by the window where he had the prisoner in full sight, smiling once in a while to himself at the recollection of that five minutes' conversation he had had with Dalton, no part of which had been on the subject of safely guarding the Mexican. At noon he got his dinner so quietly that none of the sleepers wakened. Toward mid-afternoon, Dalton and Hard came to life and ate. Villabosa was already awake, but they paid little attention to him. After he had been given food and tobacco he returned to the cot. Manning went about his farm work and Ranger Hard took his place as guard. Dalton mentioned in Villabosa's hearing that he didn't believe the people who wanted to identify the prisoner would be over before the

next day, or perhaps the day after that. He implied that he had written a letter to some sheriff about it.

Something happened in the evening that Villabosa could not understand. Manning, at supper, had seemed a little sullen, and Dalton and he had exchanged few words. Later, they went out and stood talking near the shed that sheltered agricultural implements and the automobile. Villabosa could not hear what they said, but their voices were slightly raised. He was quite sure they were arguing, and not in best of temper. Finally Dalton, from the sound, turned toward the house and Manning said something while he was on his way. The captain spoke sharply in reply over his shoulder, and now his words reached Villabosa's ears. "You can do exactly as you please about that, Jim," he said. "Stay or leave; it don't make no difference to me a-tall. Think it over and let me know in the mawnin'."

Then Dalton came in and took a nap. Manning entered the house some time later and went to bed without a word. Hard remained on guard until midnight, when he woke Dalton, who took his place.

Villabosa found it hard to get to sleep. He was puzzled at their tactics. Quite clearly it was not their intention to put him in jail or otherwise lock him up, but they had no notion of letting him out of their sight. The unusualness of this procedure worried him. He was free to eat, to sleep, to get up and move around (always under

somebody's eye) and to make himself as comfortable as he pleased, yet he would have felt somehow safer behind the doors and bolts of a jail. His last waking recollection was of the Ranger captain sitting by the window, smoking, wide awake, stern.

When he awoke in the morning he was first conscious that there was no one sitting in the chair by the window. Next he realized that voices were coming from the room in which the two Rangers slept. The walls were thin, and although the voices were pitched low, he could make out nearly every word. He closed his eyes, against the possibility of a sudden opening of the door, and listened intently.

"But I've got to go to town; you know that," Dalton was saying. "You've just natchully got to do it."

There was the sound of some one moving to get out of bed and falling back again.

"Gee!" Hard exclaimed. "My head goes around like one of these flying hawse things at the carnival. I kain't, cap'n. I don't know when I ever been so dizzy. It's my stummick, I reckon. I'll prob'ly be all right by and by. It must be something I et."

There was a brief silence. "Well, if you kain't, I s'pose you kain't," Dalton said. "But it shore leaves me in a fine mess, having to go to town and a prisoner to watch, and Manning quitting."

"Maybe, in a little while, I'll be able to get

up. I'd be all right now, I guess, if my head didn't go around so like blazes. I can watch this Mex all right."

"And have him jump you, maybe, and you toppling over, if you moved quick. Not any," Dalton decided. "But I've got to go, just the same. With only you and me left when Manning goes, we've got to get another one of the boys down, and I've got to telephone for him. Why the thunder couldn't Manning wait until some time when I didn't absolutely have to have an extra man here?"

"Maybe he had that in mind," Hard suggested. "He didn't look, when we came in yesterday mawnin', like he was aimin' to start something. It come to him afterward. Held you up good and plenty, did he?"

"He didn't get away with it. I told him he could stay for what he is getting, or go. Well, he's got to stay through to-day, till I get back from town, anyway, if I have to call upon him to do it in the name of the Service. He'll watch the Mex and get you what you want to eat."

"Eat!" ejaculated Hard. "Ugh!"

"And I'll get back as soon as I can. Ought to be here by noon or a little after. Then Manning can go as soon as he likes. I didn't believe Jim'd act like this. Him and me are off being friends for good."

Hard's voice expressed curiosity, tempered by discomfort.

"Did he—ugh! I moved my head like a fool

and started it to spinning again—did he get mad and talk rough, cap'n?"

"He didn't talk rough, not to *me*," Dalton said grimly. "He knew better. But he was good and mad, all right. I told him where he got off on this man's place, and he didn't take to it."

Footsteps came around the house, and there were sounds, in the kitchen, of breakfast preparations. The voices in the next room stopped, and Dalton came out and went toward the back of the house. Villabosa kept his eyes closed, breathing evenly. After a minute he heard voices in the kitchen, short, choppy sentences from both Dalton and Manning, but could not make out any words. He awoke officially, signalling the event by a prodigious stretching, and got up.

Except that Manning and Dalton spoke no more than was necessary during breakfast, there were no visible signs of the difficulty. Ranger Hard's absence from the table was not explained. As soon as he had finished eating, the captain went out and tinkered with his car. He drove away, not long after, and Manning, after looking in on Hard and perhaps finding him asleep, as they did not speak, came and sat by the window in the room with Villabosa. He was scowling, and once or twice the Mexican saw his lips move. He was mentally reciting, apparently, the things he wished he had nerve enough to say to Captain Dalton.

"Can I go outside? It's hot in here," Villabosa asked, after a time.

Manning nodded, and followed the Mexican, who carried a chair out on the gallery and to the end of it farthest from the room where Hard lay and, he was quite sure, out of hearing of it. Manning took along another chair and they made themselves comfortable. More than a half hour passed without a word. Then Villabosa, his voice only loud enough to reach Manning's ears, began to carry out the plan he had been formulating ever since he had been so fortunate as to awake and overhear Dalton and Hard.

"Want to make twenty-five dollars?" he asked.

Manning turned cold and suspicious eyes in his direction and let them rove away again before he replied with an uninterested monosyllable:

"No."

"Fifty?"

"No."

Villabosa shrugged his shoulders, and a shadow passed over his face. "I can't bid higher," he said. "What I wanted is not wrong—and no one in the world would ever know you did me the favor."

Three minutes passed. Then:

"How?"

"Carry a little note for me to a friend." As Manning did not reply, he added: "There will be nothing whatever in it except word that I am a prisoner. It will be up to him to do what needs to be done."

"Habeas corpus, I s'pose," Manning suggested.

"Yes. They did not let me get word to anybody that I was arrested." Villabosa sighed. "I didn't suppose you would do it, but there is nobody else. It wouldn't please your friend Captain Dalton, of course. It would put a—crimp, is it not?—a crimp in his plans. It would be lawful and right that somebody should know I was arrested, but that would not please him. I admit that. You will tell him, of course, that I asked you, but that doesn't make any difference. I told him I should get word to my friends somehow. He doesn't know for sure that I haven't already done it." He paused. "Neither do I, for that matter. I tried, in the police station at San Antonio, and some of those messages may have gone through. He won't know, when my friends act, how they found out about it."

Perhaps five minutes more passed without a word from either. Manning's face was expressionless, his eyes on a distant clump of live-oak trees that shaded a little creek. Finally he asked:

"Who to?"

"No," Villabosa said, smiling slightly. "I am not as simple as that."

"Where is he? San 'Ntonio?"

"Not as far as San Antonio, but not in this county, either. I suppose you couldn't leave this place to deliver it without explaining to Captain Dalton. I had thought maybe you could get a few days off on some excuse, and earn a

little bit of *dinero* on the side. Maybe you couldn't."

"How come you've got as much as fifty dollars on you?" Manning asked, after a little. "Didn't they take your money away?"

"I haven't," the Mexican told him promptly. "I haven't got a cent. The payment would be made on the other end when you delivered the message."

"Proud chance!" Manning remarked. "Nothing doing."

Another period of silence ensued. "I have money," Villabosa said. "Not much"—hastily—"but a little. The man I want to send word to is a man with money. He would pay as much as fifty dollars—or more—on my written order. You would only have to gamble enough of your own money to get to him, and that would not be much. I would expect to add that to the fifty—your expenses to get to him and get back."

Manning got up and went into the house. Villabosa smiled slightly as he heard him cross the front room and look in upon Ranger Hard. After a moment or two he came back and hitched his chair a little nearer to the Mexican before he sat down.

"Then when he gets the message he tells me to go take a running jump at myself," he remarked.

"I thought of that. I will give you *two* notes. One of them tells him to pay you the sixty-five dollars—fifteen dollars for expenses—and the other tells him I am arrested. You do not give

him the second one until he has paid you the sixty-five."

"The hundred," Manning corrected him. "Seventy-five dollars for doing the errand and twenty-five for expenses."

"He might not be willing to advance me that much," Villabosa hesitated.

"If you're good for fifty with him, you're prob'ly good for a hundred—if you make that first note strong enough."

It was Villabosa's turn to sit in silence, considering. He said, then:

"I need paper and pencil. And envelopes."

Manning went into the house and came out with a pencil, a pad and one envelope. "The first note don't need to be in no envelope," he remarked, significantly,—"the one I give him that tells him about the hundred. I'll want to know it is written right."

"You can read it. That is, if you can read Spanish. I can't write English."

"I don't read Spanish much," Manning said, "but maybe I can read enough to know the substance of what you're saying." He looked uneasily toward the road. "Better get busy. The cap'n didn't aim to get home before evenin', but he might make it quicker'n he thought. Or Hard might come out."

Villabosa wrote hurriedly.

The first note, when it was finished, he handed to Manning, who pored over it slowly. He couldn't make out every word, having told the

truth when he said he didn't read Spanish well, but he spoke the language quite fluently, although ungrammatically, and he was able to see that Villabosa had put nothing in that he had agreed to leave out. He handed it back and commanded: " Read it out loud."

" 'Very important,' " Villabosa read. " 'Please pay to the man who gives you this letter one hundred dollars, which I agree to repay to you at the first possible moment. When you have paid it, he will give you another letter, which contains information worth more than one hundred dollars to both of us.—Salvador Villabosa.' "

" You haven't put his name at the top," Manning objected.

" No. And it is better that I should not. I tell you the name and the address, and when he receives it, he will know."

"All right; it's you that's tryin' to get loose. If you don't play your cards right, it hurts you worse'n it does me. I think," Manning said, as an afterthought, " I think I'll need to look at the other letter, too. I gotta make sure there isn't anything in it that gives me away."

Villabosa went to work on the second letter. He looked up once to ask, " How do I describe this place? I have to tell him where I am."

" Cap'n Dalton's farm in San Miguel County."

The Mexican finished the note and handed it to Manning, who puzzled over it for some minutes; plainly he was not having as easy a time

translating this one as he had had with the first. "Read it," he finally said, passing it back. "I guess I got it pretty well, but I'd like to hear you go over it in English."

Villabosa read:

> I am an unlawful prisoner. I was arrested in San Antonio, without any charge being made against me, and put in the police station incommunicado. I was turned over to Captain Dalton of the Texas Rangers, and he brought me here to his farm in San Miguel County. I am not allowed to send word to friends or get a lawyer. I do not know why I am arrested and am not guilty of any crime. Habeas corpus should be started at once. Get a good lawyer and see to it, please.
>
> The messenger who used to serve us being dead, I advise, without waiting, that you get another from across the river at once.
>
> SALVADOR VILLABOSA.

"What's that mean about a messenger?" Manning asked suspiciously.

"It has nothing to do with my getting free. It is a reply to a letter he wrote me, which he wanted me to answer at once. I don't see how it does any harm to put it in."

"Oh, I s'pose not," Manning agreed. "Now where do I take these?"

"To Pedro Flores, Eagle Pass. He lives ——" Followed careful directions as to

finding the house. "Almost always you will find him at home. He is retired from active business."

"All right." Manning took the sealed envelope with the long letter and put it carefully away with the note that called for his payment. "And, look here, *hombre!* If this man Flores don't live up to what you say and come across with that hundred, I'll put this whole business up to Cap'n Dalton —— I don't have to tell him I've been down there, you know; all I'll need to say to him is that you've turned me over these letters and that I *said* I'd deliver 'em—and what he'll do to you will prob'ly be a-plenty."

"You'll get the hundred," Villabosa said.

Manning hitched his chair farther away from the prisoner, and they relapsed into silence.

CHAPTER XIX

Dalton drove in at one o'clock, and Manning, as soon as the captain had eaten dinner, saddled his horse and left the place. He and Dalton had spoken briefly, while the Ranger was eating, and Villabosa had not been able to hear what they said. He knew, however, that Manning had asked Dalton if it was all right for him to go now, and that Manning had expected him to think that he was asking Dalton for permission to take a brief vacation.

Ranger Hard's health improved as the day went on, and he was able (although Villabosa was not aware of the details, because Hard ate earlier than the others) to partake of some slight nourishment. Two slices of ham, four fried eggs, much bread and butter and half a can of peaches, to be exact. He said, when he came out of the kitchen, that his "stummick" was certainly better.

While Hard guarded Villabosa, a little after dark, Dalton went out of the house and sauntered circuitously to the clump of live oaks that shadowed the creek. There, beyond a little rise which would have made them invisible from the house even if there had been no trees, he came upon

Jim Manning, reclining comfortably on his back and smoking.

"It worked," Manning informed him, without preface, and handed Dalton the two notes. "For Pedro Flores, Eagle Pass."

He recounted the forenoon's happenings.

"Did you read this sealed letter?" the captain asked. "Does it say anything about being sealed?"

"No."

Dalton slit the envelope. He switched on a flashlight and ran his eye over the contents.

"I don't read Spanish much, you know," Manning said, "but it seemed to me, as near as I could follow it, that he translated it to me pretty straight, except perhaps that last paragraph. I can tell you how he read that: 'The messenger who used to work for us being dead, I advise that you don't wait, but get another from across the river at once.'"

Captain Dalton's face, in the reflected light of his torch, expressed grim satisfaction.

"What it says," he remarked, reading carefully, "is 'The messenger who last served us is dead. Without waiting for me to get another, get the other across the river at once.'"

"Not much difference, is there? Although that 'another' and 'other' don't seem exactly to make sense."

"'The other' doesn't refer to a messenger," Dalton declared, positively.

"To what?"

The captain left the question unanswered. He was studying the sheet of paper before him. Finally, coming to a decision, he took his pocket-knife and cut it across between the two paragraphs. Then he trimmed the lower part at sides and bottom, so there was no margin at all. When he had finished, there remained two sentences and a signature:

> The messenger who last served us is dead. Without waiting for me to get another, get the other across the river at once.
>
> SALVADOR VILLABOSA.

He handed this to Manning. "There! That's a nice little letter for Mr. Flores," he said. "It'll get us the kind of action we want, without causing him to get all worked up about his friend Villabosa being in the hands of the law."

"You mean I'm to deliver this?"

"To Pedro Flores, at Eagle Pass. Not in too much of a hurry. Not until I have a chance to get down there and hang around about twenty-four hours looking into things. I've sent for another man, and Ranger McQuestion will get here to-morrow mawnin'. Then I'll leave and move on down to Eagle Pass. I'll be there to-morrow evenin'. To-morrow's Saturday. You blow in about Monday mawnin', and do your little errand with Flores without paying any attention to me a-tall. Stop at the hotel, and I'll find a way to get word to you if there's anything I want to

tell you. After you've seen Flores, you can hunt me up, when there's nobody around, and tell me what happened. I'll be stopping at the hotel, too."

"Wait a minute. Do my errand, you say. I kain't do it the way Villabosa laid it out without both letters."

"And the trimming I gave that letter costs you exactly one hundred iron American dollars," Dalton grinned. "You don't give him that one a-tall. He'd know something was wrong with Villabosa in a minute, because Villabosa's got plenty of money and wouldn't have to give a messenger an order for pay at the other end. No. You just give him this here little short message, and you tell him Villabosa wrote it small and trimmed the paper so's you could carry it in the sweatband of your hat and if anything happened that you got searched, it'd probably get overlooked. I don't believe it would do any harm if you sort of let Flores think there are reasons why getting arrested and searched wouldn't come as a great surprise to you at any minute. And you tell him Villabosa gave you the letter in San 'Ntonio. He didn't explain to you when he hired you why he didn't want to use the mails or the telegraph or the telephone, but you got the idea that the matter was too darn' secret to take any chances with 'em. And if he asks you what the letter means about the messenger that is dead, you tell him you don't know."

"I don't," Manning remarked invitingly.

"Then you'll be able to tell him so convincing that he kain't help but believe it. All right. You go out and lose yourself somewhere until over Sunday, and slide into Eagle Pass Monday mawnin' with your note and get it into Flores' hands, secret, as soon after as convenient. In the meantime, there's something I want you to do to-night. Call William B. Lamb, of San 'Ntonio, on the telephone. He's the collector of customs there, but you'll prob'ly have to get him at his house. Tell him you are talking for a man who went in an automobile party to San Miguel County; don't mention my name unless you have to, but ask him if he understands. If he doesn't, you can give my name. Then you tell him I want him to get word to a man named Napier to catch the first train for Eagle Pass. Have him tell Napier not to look me up or come near me, or even recognize me if he sees me on the street, unless I speak to him first, but to get in touch with the customs officers there and have 'em keep their eyes extra wide open until further notice. Remember all that?"

Manning repeated most of it.

"Correct. And if you have luck, maybe Napier can catch to-night's train and be there when I get in. Have Lamb tell him to get the first one he can, anyway. I guess that's all. I'll be moving back along toward the house. Hard will be wanting to eat another litle snack of victuals before I go to bed, I reckon. He spent the day in fasting and prayer."

The telephone message, relayed by Collector Lamb, reached Napier at the Bonham after a most unsatisfactory day. He had made absolutely no progress at all. His visit to the Chinese grocery had developed no new information; Kwong Yet's travels had not brought him in touch with any one of whom it was safe to ask questions; he and Kwong Li hoped another twenty-four hours would have better results; meantime they accepted the situation Orientally.

Back in his room he had received Gordon's report as to the espionage of Kalat, and it had unsettled him. Kalat had remained at home until noon, when he had taken a walk that seemed aimless but brought him finally to the Chinese "great house," where he remained not more than ten minutes. He went, then, to the Bonham, where he inquired for Villabosa. The hotel people, not unused to having their Mexican refugees absent themselves mysteriously from the house for two or three days without explanation, had informed him merely that Villabosa was not in. Kalat had then done much as he did the afternoon before, wandering about the plazas and seeming to get entertainment out of the shows. He had eaten a leisurely dinner at the St. Francis hotel, smoked on the loggia for an hour, and then walked to the Edgemont, where he sent his name to Captain Glenn and was invited to come up. Some time later he came down in the elevator, accompanied by Miss Glenn, and they talked for a few minutes alone in the little lounge off the

lobby. After this, Kalat walked to the nearest car line, transferred at the most direct point, and returned to his boarding place at 311 Chiromoya Street, where Gordon had been relieved for the night by another agent.

Kalat had been to see Ng Choy or one of Ng Choy's men at the " great house." He had tried to find the missing Villabosa. He had called on Captain Glenn and talked confidentially with Miss Glenn.

Napier had a troubled conscience. He had done nothing whatever that day to have Captain Glenn's movements followed. He had not mentioned to Lamb or to any customs agent what Madame Frezzi had told him regarding the army man. He had put it off, saying to himself that he would take care of that detail of the investigation in person, but he had not begun to do so. He would not believe that Ruth Glenn was willingly involved with criminals, yet he hadn't done a thing to prove she wasn't, because—he grimaced as he admitted it to himself—it might turn out she was. He had neglected an obvious duty.

It was while he was revolving this disquieting thought that Lamb called him and gave him Dalton's message. Scarcely more than a half hour remained before train time.

Notifying the hotel office that he would be out of town for a day or two but wished to keep his room, and ordering an automobile to be ready to take him to the station, he packed for the trip.

This wasn't as simple a matter as it would have been for the ordinary tourist; not only did clothes and articles for use on a brief excursion have to be selected and thrown into one bag, but various belongings that were in his trunk, which it would not do to leave, had to be taken along. He worked systematically and rapidly.

He had finished, locked his trunk and suitcase, and stood at the door, bag in hand, taking one final look about to be sure he had forgotten nothing, when the telephone bell tinkled.

"Mr. Napier?" came in Ruth Glenn's voice.

"Yes, Miss Glenn."

"I seem to be fated always to call you late at night. But you said night or day. Can you come to see me, please? I——" Her voice shook a trifle. "It has happened, I think. Or is going to."

He had promised when "it" happened, to "come a-running," and she was so sure he would keep his word that she was going on without waiting for his answer. "I am not in my room," she said, "but downstairs, in the booth. There is no place here where we could be sure not to be disturbed. Can you come in an automobile? We can ride a little and talk. I will be waiting in that little lounge room."

"I'm so sorry, but I can't," Napier cried, fuming inwardly that he had to talk rapidly and sharply if he would not miss the train. "I am going out of town for a few days and my train leaves in fifteen minutes. The car to take me to

the station is waiting right now. I'm so sorry, Miss Glenn, but just as soon as I get back ——"

"*Can't* you come to-night?"

"I'm afraid it is absolutely impossible."

"If you can't, you can't," she said, and there was a hopeless note in her voice—or was it a frightened one? "Well —— I mustn't make you miss your train."

"The very minute I get back ——" he began, but she said:

"That may be—too late. I hope it won't. Good-by."

He caught the train with seconds to spare. Through half the night, while he tossed and turned and tried to summon sleep, the thought persisted that Kalat had talked to her, alone, not an hour before she telephoned. The car wheels spurning the joints of the rails clicked an interminable message, "Kalat was there! Kalat was there!"

What had Kalat told her that made her believe the thing she feared had happened or was about to happen? And why—unless the reason she had given him was true—was she appealing to Napier?

There was another thought, an ugly one. Had Kalat, friend and master of Madame Frezzi, visitor to Ng Choy and searcher for Villabosa, holder of confidential conversations with Ruth Glenn and her father,—had Kalat become aware of the official personality of Julian Napier and set a trap for him with the oldest bait

in the world? Had he asked her to invite him to a midnight ride? Or perhaps ordered it?

He put this immediately out of his head as impossible and refused to dwell upon it—many times. But always, as drowsiness crept over him and his brain took unguided charge of its own operations, the question came leaping back, and with it stark wakefulness.

CHAPTER XX

Across the wide, slow-sweeping Rio Grande at Eagle Pass stretches an international bridge, high above the coffee-colored tide, at its further end a rough-paved street that leads up a hill between adobe houses, on past the *cuartel* to a plaza with a squat-towered church. The City of Porfirio Diaz it used to be called, new-named Piedras Negras since the brief day in power of Don Panchito Madero.

There was a time, not so many years ago, when crossing this bridge did not mean much of a formality unless one had a certain reputation or aroused suspicion. That was when Don Porfirio administered the high, the low and the middle justice in Old Mexico, and Americans were not only welcome across the border, but safe.

Sundays in the hot springtime, in those days, saw excursion trains running in from as far away as San Antonio, hundreds of whose passengers alighted at Eagle Pass and walked across this bridge, to avoid the tedious train inspection of the Mexican officials on the railroad viaduct. When they had come into Mexico, with no more trouble or inconvenience than one suffers in entering Canada at Niagara Falls, they wandered through narrow-sidewalked streets, swarmed over the

plaza with its feverish gambling tables in the shadow of the church, followed dark-skinned little men with roosters under their arms to the cockpits, and finally, as the sun began to lower, witnessed the killing of four bulls and a dozen rack-o'-bones horses (and sometimes of a *capador* who stubbed his toe or his judgment) in the Plaza de Toros where a file of shabby convict soldiers sat with their rifles between their knees behind the frock-coated, silk-hatted *jefe politico* in his seat of honor on the shady side. It was safe to let crowds gather in Northern Mexico in those days, and the thirty or forty shuffling, hang-dog soldiers were not present at the bull-fight in fear of any revolutionary uprising, but only to guard against the impulse that sometimes seizes a Latin populace to tear the amphitheatre to pieces if the bulls or the human performers do not give satisfaction.

The little Mexican city is still there at the end of the bridge, but those whose business calls them in one direction or the other run a stricter gauntlet. There are passports to be inspected, or "border permits," which are issued only to persons living within ten miles of the border and good only for a belt of ten miles on the other side. One does not, unchallenged, pass the guard-houses on the bridge with a nod; unless he has the proper documents and carries nothing upon him that the regulations of one country or the other forbid, he does not pass at all.

The long bridge looked deserted as a horseman

clattered out upon it on Monday afternoon. There were men, to be sure, in the American guardhouse, a hundred yards this side of the white monument that marks the place where one steps from the States into Mexico, and men in the Mexican guardhouse beyond the boundary, and, of course, they were looking at him through the windows of their little stations, but for the moment they were invisible.

The rider was a man of thirty or thereabouts, dressed rather elaborately in the fashion that often represents a cowboy's ideal of sartorial elegance, although his outfit was not at all new. His peaked hat was a little higher and a little broader brimmed than common, and obviously expensive. His corduroy trousers were tucked into high boots that cost as much or more than the hat; custom-made boots of finest leather, with heels so high that walking meant discomfort, and with four-inch fancy straps dangling at each side of their tops. His shirt, open at the neck with a loose-knotted tie, was of fancy material.

He dismounted in front of the American guardhouse, hitched his horse to the rail, and nodded to the inspector whose face appeared at the window. "Good evenin', Mr. Burke," he said easily. He caught sight of Julian Napier, sitting in a corner of the little building behind the inspector, saw that he was a stranger, and nodded again casually to include him in the greeting.

His right hand was already at his hip, lifting a six-shooter from a holster that hung inside his

trousers. He handed it, butt first, to the inspector. He collected a half-dozen cartridges from a pocket, and turned them over. "That's all," he said. The inspector came out of the house and ran a practiced hand over his clothes. Arms and ammunition, under the American law, may not be carried into Mexico. Whether the rider had anything in his pockets that the Mexicans would not want him to bring into their country was a matter of concern only to the inspectors at the other end of the bridge, beyond the white stone monument.

"All right, Mr. Sanders," Inspector Burke said. The man turned and limped to his horse. It was not a very noticeable limp, merely a slight stiffness of the right ankle, apparently. He threw his leg over his horse, and steadied the animal as it would have set off.

"Better come over with me and have a li'l' snifter," he grinned. "This side of the river gets awful dry."

"It sure does," Inspector Burke replied, not taking the invitation for more than the pleasantry it was intended to be. "Take two—one for me."

"By golly, that's a great idea!" Sanders cried. "Dogged if I don't." He let his horse go, and they saw him alight again at the Mexican guardhouse and submit to search. After a bit, he went his way.

He had disappeared up the hill in the direction of the plaza when Captain Dalton, afoot, came

out on the bridge and entered the American guardhouse. No one except the officers was in within hearing; they could talk freely.

"What has he been doing, all this time?" Napier asked eagerly, the moment the Captain arrived.

"Nothing. Just loafing around. Looks like he had been waiting for some special time to go across. Manning gave Villabosa's note to old man Flores at half-past eight, and Flores sent for this Sanders *pronto*. Sanders didn't stay at his house more'n ten or fifteen minutes. Since then he's been killing time, as near as I can make out. Is he in the habit of crossing pretty often?" he asked the inspector.

"Pretty nearly every day," Burke replied. "He has a border permit."

"Does he usually go about this time of day?"

The inspector thought. "I don't remember his ever going in the morning," he said. "Yes, I guess it's always at just about this time. He says he goes over on business, and laughs. Doesn't make any bones of the fact that mostly he slips over to get a couple of drinks. If he made any practice of coming back drunk he'd lose his permit, but he doesn't. He always has a fine ripe smell of ex-American whiskey on him, but I've never seen him even pleasantly jingled."

"Do you know where he goes, over there?"

"We make it our business to find that out, regarding people who cross a good deal," Burke

smiled. "He mostly goes to just one place. It's a barroom. Run by a Chink named Tom Sing."

"You have searched him?"

"Of course."

"Ever investigate those high heels on his shoes?"

"No. We've never had grounds to especially suspect him, you know."

"We won't overlook the heels this time," Napier said. "What have you found out about him, captain?"

"Not much, because folks here in Eagle Pass know mighty little about him. He's been here about two months, without any visible means of support, but with enough money in his clothes so he hasn't had to hang up any debts. Says he used to have some cattle in West Texas, and sold 'em. Talks about maybe going into business here, if he finds something he likes, but hasn't found it yet. Principal friend, old Pedro Flores, —and that's against him, to start with; he isn't the kind of a feller, by his looks, that chums with any Mexican just to be chummy. There is talk that he used to be more or less bad, out there in West Texas, but, of course, I haven't had time to look that up. He explained that little limp of his, once, by saying he and another feller were having a little argument and the feller got him in the ankle. Didn't go into any details, but sort of left the impression that *his* bullet landed higher than the foot."

"He wears a gun regular," Burke said. "Always checks it here."

"He hasn't any legal right to—not in this county, anyway. I inquired about that. It's handy to know; gives a reason for arresting him, if you want him and there isn't any better one. Let's look at his gun."

He closely examined the weapon that Burke passed him.

"Don't it beat all," he commented, "how vanity makes a man do that, nine times out of ten?" and showed them two parallel file marks on the side of the barrel. "Of course he may have bought this gun from the man that put those notches in, but seeing as he seems to have a reputation for being bad, the chances are at least equal that he earned 'em himself."

He handed the pistol back to Burke. "Better not let him get within reach of it until after you've searched him," he advised. "And don't overlook his hawse."

Napier nodded. "It certainly looks as though Flores might be sending him after the diamond, doesn't it?"

"Either sending him after it, or sending orders by him to somebody else to bring it in," the captain agreed. "And if the orders were to go to somebody else, why did Flores have to send a messenger? He could have telephoned."

"Where is Flores? Is he being watched?"

"I didn't have a chance to tell you, when we had those few words this forenoon, that I ran into

Cap'n Williams of the Service. He had written me a letter, by the way, which, of course, I hadn't got yet, containing a lot of nice, valuable information about our friend Villabosa. It may come in handy. Well, I asked the cap'n to help me out, and he's over in Flores' house at this minute, questioning him about a cattle mix-up between some Mexicans across the river and some over here on this side that Flores never heard of, because the whole thing is imaginary. The cap'n will stay there, though, until we get somewhere or don't. If we should happen to get the goods on Mr. Sanders, there won't be any danger of Flores making a get-away or doing any telephoning. And Manning is within reach, if he needs him."

"It would be a nervy proceeding to try to bring it in past us in broad daylight," Napier said.

"This Ed Sanders looks like a nervy person. I'm as likely to be wrong as right, and frequently more so, but I won't believe he hasn't got that Turkish rock somewhere on him until you've got through searching him."

"How much is it worth?" Inspector Burke asked Napier.

"Two hundred thousand dollars. Perhaps more."

The inspector whistled. "Forty thousand dollars duty! No wonder the owner can afford to hire able men to slip it across for him. You said there were two, didn't you?"

"Yes, but the other, unless I am mistaken, is already in. That's forty thousand more we didn't get. And it looks as though it came through here."

Burke did not take offense. He was not on duty the entire twenty-four hours, so the responsibility for the post was divided, and a competent customs officer does not fool himself into thinking he can never be outwitted. "If Sanders is the man, it could have been in one of those heels, at that," he admitted, thoughtfully.

"It didn't take him long to get his two drinks this afternoon," Captain Dalton remarked. "Here he comes on to the bridge. While you pull your search, I'll go out and lean up against the rail, like I was just a caller who didn't want to get under foot."

Sanders came to the Mexican guardhouse and alighted. They saw two officers come out and examine his horse, and Sanders emptied all his pockets to show them he was not bringing out of the country any gold or an illegal amount of silver. He remounted presently, and came cantering across the boundary.

"I took your drink, Mr. Burke, and it tasted just as good as mine did," he laughed, as he slid off his horse and limped toward the guardhouse. "Nothing dutiable," he added perfunctorily. "Let me come in and sit down a minute, will you? I've got something in my boot that's hurting like blazes."

He came through the door, sat in the chair that

Dalton had just vacated, hauled off his right boot, turned it upside down, and let a forty-five cartridge fall to the floor.

"That's a nice little thing to have squeezed up against the side of your foot!" he remarked. "I was cleaning my pistol this noon and dropped that cartridge, and it fell into the top of my boot. 'Stay there!' says I. 'You'll be safe,' and never looked for it to give me any trouble. But the darned thing slipped down. Man, it felt as big as a house."

"Let's have a look at that boot, while you've got it off," Burke said.

He examined it carefully, saw that the heel was fastened on in the usual manner, and ran his arm down inside the boot to satisfy himself there was no entrance to it from the interior. Sanders watched his movements with a grin. "Want the other one?" he asked, and stuck out his left foot. "Pull it off, will you, please, suh?"

Burke accommodated and gave the second boot an examination as thorough as the first, during which Sanders put on the other. The inspector handed it back, after a moment or two, and Sanders put it on also. "All right?" he asked good-naturedly.

"All right so far as the boots go," the inspector told him. "Stand up, please. We'll look you over a little." He smiled. "Have to do this to our regular customers about once in so often, you know."

Sanders not only made no objection to the

search, but cheerfully assisted in it. He chatted with Burke and Napier, who looked sharply on, and showed no impatience at the inspector's thoroughness. When they had satisfied themselves that nothing so small as a one-carat diamond, much less one almost as large as a pigeon's egg, could possibly be concealed on his person, they went outside and paid careful attention to the trappings of his horse. He watched them tolerantly from the doorway.

Burke succeeded in showing no disappointment as, after a glance at Napier which the special agent answered with a nod, he told Sanders the inquisition was over. "That's all," he smiled. "Sorry to have to make you so much trouble, after that drink you bought me—and drank."

"No trouble at all," Sanders told him cordially. "It's your job. Now if you will let me have my pistol, please, suh!"

Burke handed it over, together with the extra cartridges, and he stowed it in the holster inside his waistband. He unhitched his horse and prepared to mount, Burke and Napier both standing outside the doorway of the guardhouse.

"Well, so long, gentlemen," he called, and put his left toe to the stirrup. Something in the way his other foot twisted on the ground gave Napier a sudden flash of inspiration.

"Wait!" he called. "Stop!" And, as Sanders' leg had already lifted lightly over the horse and he was settling into the saddle, "Get down again, please. We overlooked that foot."

One swift look Sanders cast toward Napier and Burke; they had no weapons in their hands and were not reaching for any. His glance flew in the direction of Eagle Pass; the road was clear. His face set into hard, determined lines; his eyes narrowed; his right hand moved stealthily toward the pistol on his hip.

"Leave that gun alone! You're under arrest!" snapped Captain Dalton, from the previously unobserved side lines.

Sanders looked at Dalton and saw that he had not moved to draw a pistol. He could overawe three with a waving gun as well as two. His hand snapped to his revolver and his fingers closed on the butt; as it came from its holster Dalton drew and fired with what seemed to be one uninterrupted motion, and shot him through the right shoulder. Sanders reeled in the saddle, his horse spun, pitched and threw him, and his pistol went flying and rebounded from the plank roadway.

Dazed anger substituted in his brain for ordinary discretion. He staggered to his knees, to his feet, and stumbled toward the pistol, his right arm hanging helpless, his left hand extended.

"Leave it alone!" warned Dalton. "Don't pick up that gun!" He paid no heed. "You damn fool!" the Ranger cried, almost dispassionately, and fired again. The bullet shattered Sanders' left forearm. "Now if you've got any more ways of picking it up, try 'em,

and I'll just natchully have to let you have it *right.*"

"What quarrel is this of yours?" Sanders demanded weakly. He swayed, fell over, came to a sitting position and contemplated his bleeding arm. Napier ran and kicked his gun away from him, then took possession of it.

"Ranger Service," the captain explained tersely. "You was arrested for totin' a gun, and you resisted. If you want to tell anybody it was for anything else, that's *your* business. Understand?"

The man was suffering and faint. "You shore handle a pistol some quick," he mumbled, trying to smile, and fell back on the boards. "You'd better get me to a doctor, hadn't you? I'm all shot to pieces."

Dalton was already busy with crude first aid. "Don't worry, *hombre,*" he said, not at all angrily, almost soothingly. "You ain't bad hurt. It's lucky for you I most always hit where I'm looking, and know I can. If I didn't, I prob'ly wouldn't have taken no chances, you with your hand on a gun thataway. We'll have you fixed up all right."

He turned to Napier and Burke, as men came running along the bridge from the town. "I went to take a gun off him, and he started something," he said. "That's all we'll tell 'em. Nothing about your being mixed into it a-tall. When we get him to a doctor—you come with me, Napier—we'll get this foot off"—he tapped

Sanders' ankle with his knuckles—" and have a look. Wasn't I a darn' fool not to think of it? He doesn't limp hardly any." He looked down at the white-faced Sanders, frank admiration in his eyes. "And wasn't it a foxy stunt for him to get that right boot off and on again himself, first thing, so you natchully wouldn't investigate that corner of him a-tall."

In a room next to the one where the wounded man lay, a half hour later, Dalton and Napier and one of the two doctors examined an artificial lower leg. Out of its cavity, which had been cleverly enlarged, Napier drew a package with a bright orange label, marked in Chinese. " Please note, in order that you can testify to it when called upon, doctor," he said, " that this is found in the leg that you yourself detached from the prisoner."

" Opium, eh? " the physician commented.

" Wait a minute. If we have guessed right ——" Napier pried off the top of the box and disclosed the usual brown, gummy mass of the forbidden drug. " Is there something we can empty this into? " The doctor brought a flat metal basin, and the others stood close as Napier carefully dumped the contents of the tin into it.

At the bottom of the can, quite hidden in the opium, was a symmetrically shaped object wrapped in oiled silk and sealed. Napier ripped its covering with the point of his pocketknife, and held on the palm of his hand, its facets flashing

in the afternoon sunlight, a magnificent unmounted diamond. As his hand moved with his breathing—and perhaps with excitement—the jewel blazed and glittered with a cold, blue-white iridescence. Even the undemonstrative Captain Dalton caught his breath.

"This is seized by the Government, of course," Napier told the physician, "but for the present there must be no publicity. I ask you to keep it as secret as you would a professional matter."

The doctor nodded agreement. "How much is it worth?" he asked, his voice reverent.

"That is a matter for the appraiser. I am not sure which one this is, but I think, from its color, that it is the one called the Gorgeous Lily."

"Are there two?"

"There were, where this came from," Napier evaded, just as he had avoided naming the value. "That is all, I think, doctor, if you want to get back to your patient."

He rewrapped the stone, and the doctor went reluctantly away.

"This man has been bringing in a can every day," Napier told Dalton confidently. "When the supply got large enough to make it worth while, a messenger came down from San Antonio and got it. There hasn't been any messenger for at least eight or ten days and we don't know how much longer; *somewhere* hereabouts there are a number of tins of opium. For a best guess, somewhere in or near Pedro Flores' house."

Dalton nodded agreement with this. "Somebody has to stay with this Sanders after the doctors get through with him," he said, with decision, "to keep him under arrest and, more important at this stage of the game, to see that he doesn't have any visitors. You will attend to that, I suppose."

"As soon as I can get a customs officer here. Can you stay around until he comes? I want to gather two or three of the men in a hurry and get over to Flores' place."

"You will find Cap'n Williams still visiting with him, and the cap'n will keep him from getting in the way while you search—or out of the way. If you need any extra help you'll prob'ly find Jim Manning waiting handy to the place somewhere; I told him to stick around in case Williams needed him. You don't know Manning, but he's a big, red-headed young feller. He will prob'ly show up in sight when he sees you men going into the house."

Napier, who had put the diamond in the innermost pocket of his vest and pinned the pocket fast above it, took up the tin and scrutinized it. He got out his knife again and picked at the label. The paper, stuck only at the top and bottom, came away readily and disclosed another label of similar appearance beneath it. To the eye which sees all Chinese ideographs as a scrawl of hopeless hieroglyphics, the two would have looked to be the same, but the ideographs were not identical at all.

"Fastened loosely," he commented to Dalton, "so the outer label could be removed and the tin would not look different from any of the others, once it had been delivered. They could be depended upon there not to mix it with common opium cans. The messenger, unless he was Chinese, would never realize that one of the tins in his lot was different from the others, or, if he did notice that the marks were not the same, would think it merely meant a different shipper."

He got out the fragment of label that Angel Puenta's dying clutch had retained, and compared them. So far as matching was possible, they were identical. He nodded slowly. "When Villabosa wrote 'the other one,' he meant exactly what you thought he meant," he said. "Puenta carried the first stone to San Antonio on his last trip."

He studied the ideographs on the false label.

"Can you read that stuff?" Dalton asked.

"I think so. I'll have to check it up with some plates I've got over in the hotel, but unless I am mistaken——" He let a finger drop from character to character in the left-hand column: "This reads: 'For the Honorable Wu Tsai.'" His finger went to the top ideograph on the right. "And this says: 'Society of the Fragrant Lily.'"

"What does that mean?"

"It is the address. I know the headquarters of the Society of the Fragrant Lily, in San Antonio, and I thought I knew the names of all the

leading Chinese in it, but ——" His forehead wrinkled with undisguised disappointment. "I don't know who Wu Tsai is, or where he hangs out. I never heard of him. He is a brand-new character."

CHAPTER XXI

VILLABOSA, sitting in the front room of Dalton's farmhouse, maintained an outward appearance of sneering calm, but his eyes glowed with the malignant hatred of a cornered rattlesnake. Napier, who had been doing the talking, sat back with a look at Dalton that inquired whether he had overlooked anything, and the Ranger nodded approval.

"So there you are," Napier summed it up. "We have Flores. We have his man Sanders. We have sixteen five-tael cans of opium from Flores' house. We have the diamond. . . . And we have your letter to Flores, telling him to have it brought over without awaiting the arrival of a messenger, because Angel Puenta is dead."

Villabosa still sat silent.

"In other words, the jig is up," Dalton added.

"If it was, you wouldn't be talking to me at all," the Mexican retorted, with cunning appraisal of the situation. "You would have me on my way back to San Antonio, to go before a Federal court. Suppose you say the rest of it."

"Where is the other diamond?" Napier demanded. "We can find it, of course, but you can make it easier for us. If you do, perhaps

you won't hang or go to prison for life as an accessory to Puenta's murder."

"I won't do that, anyway. I had nothing to do with it."

"You didn't see him drop that label on the floor of the Bonham and telephone Joe Fong, I suppose."

This first intimation that they knew to whom he had telephoned must have come as a shock, but Villabosa had had many hours to consider all the possibilities of the law's demands upon him in connection with Puenta's death, and he replied coolly:

"I did not. I don't know what evidence you think you have that makes you say I telephoned to a Joe Fong or anybody else, but even if you were able to prove that I did, and even if you were able to prove that I told him Puenta had a lost paper, that wouldn't prove that I wanted him killed or that I knew he would be killed."

"You're quite a lawyer, ain't you?" Dalton remarked.

"It doesn't take a lawyer to know that much," Villabosa said. "I don't know who killed Puenta, or anything about it."

"Where is that other diamond?" Napier asked again.

"I don't know."

He did not say it sincerely, nor did he put himself out particularly to make his words sound sincere.

"Has it been delivered to Kalat?"

The expression of puzzled surprise that flitted over Villabosa's face was not feigned. "Is that a man or a place?" he asked. "I don't know the name."

"Has Sastanada got it?"

This time his ignorance was counterfeited. "I don't know him, either."

"You don't think you have a chance in a million of ever doing any more work with this particular gang, do you? Or of getting any share of whatever the gang's profits are from handling that stone for Sastanada. You see we know you had it brought across. Wouldn't you be showing ordinary common sense if you got in out of the rain while the getting in is good?"

"If there is another diamond anywhere," Villabosa replied warily, "and if I had any idea where it was, wouldn't I be showing ordinary common sense if I kept my mouth shut until I found out what the proposition was? You haven't said anything yet to show me where I'd be getting in out of the rain any more by talking than I would by keeping still."

"We'll listen to any proposition you want to make," Napier told him.

Villabosa was prepared with it. "I don't admit I know a thing about any other diamond, or, if I did, that I have the slightest idea where it is," he said. "But if I did, I should make a suggestion something like this: I might be willing to tell all I knew, privately—not as state's evidence, in court; I'd take a sentence in jail be-

fore I would go that far to antagonize certain people—and when I had done so, and you had had plenty of time to learn whether I told the truth or not, I go free. I have a little money in a bank in San Antonio. Let me get it. Then let me get out of the country. Not to Mexico. Say to Cuba or South America."

Napier shook his head. "Not a chance," he replied.

"Then you can find out where that diamond is by yourself—and by the time you get track of it they will have heard of what happened at Eagle Pass, and"—he waved his hand widely and concluded with a most characteristic American expression—"blooie!"

Napier turned to Dalton. "You talk to him, Captain."

The Ranger fixed a stern eye on the Mexican, but his first words seemed to refer only to the recent exhibition of American idiom. "You speak English pretty fluently, don't you? Where did you learn?"

"I have a moderately good education," Villabosa shrugged.

"You must have come of a pretty good family. Where?"

"That is my concern. My family has nothing to do with this matter."

"No," Dalton agreed. "I suppose it hasn't. It was just my idea that perhaps there was a time when you wasn't mixed up with a gang of crooks, like you are now. I thought maybe something

might have come up that pried you loose from associating with decent people. You might have made a mistake, or something."

Villabosa's eyes were suspicious, but he did not answer.

"Well," the Ranger went on. "As you say, your family and where you came from and all that is your concern. But where you *go* is ours. Now I've been talking your case over a little with Mr. Napier, here,—and with one or two other people,—and, as long as you've declared so strong and positive what you'll do and what you won't do, I'll do a little declaring myself."

He paused a second and then went on, evenly: "There's something in what you say about going on the witness stand and testifying against those Chinks; I don't suppose I'd want to do it myself. And we're prepared—I'm speaking for Mr. Napier, of course; he's just letting me do the talking at this stage of the game because I've had a little more experience with fellers of your kind than he has and —— By the way, have you ever happened to hear about any experiences any of your bandit friends ever had with me?"

"I have no bandit friends," Villabosa said sullenly, but it was clear enough his recollection was supplying incidents such as those to which the Ranger referred.

"I merely asked that so you could remember that I've got a habit of keeping my promises. Well, as I was saying, maybe you won't have to testify against anybody. Maybe we can produce

the evidence that convicts you and all the rest of the gang for the smuggling without any of your fellow crooks having to know that you gave them away at all. That remains to be seen. If, after you've told us the facts, we can get away with it that way, we will. Then your life will be moderately safe after you get out of the pen. So that's understood. But you are going to tell us. And in token of our appreciation of your doing it we are going to try you for smuggling, or let the San Antonio police have you, perhaps, for being accessory to the murder of Puenta. That is, if they want you, which perhaps they won't."

"I'm likely to tell you under those circumstances," Villabosa sneered.

"But if you don't tell us all you know—who killed Puenta, where the diamond is, who is in the gang and where its headquarters is—Mr. Napier is going to turn you over to me, and I'm going to take you down to the river and push you across."

The prisoner sensed that a threat was concealed in this, but he could not see where. "And shoot me while I'm swimming, or something like that?"

"Oh, we're no murderers," Dalton assured him. "No, I wouldn't harm a hair of your head. I would just take you to the middle of the river and say to whatever Mexican officer came out to get you, 'Here's a fellow countryman of yours that we don't need over here. You better take him and see that he keeps out of trouble hereafter.' At Matamoras."

Somewhere in that last word Villabosa knew the threat centered, but still it was meaningless to him. "At Matamoras?" he repeated.

"It's the darndest thing," the Ranger went on conversationally, "how a man's mistakes of judgment will come up to bother him. Take your old friend Pancho Villa, for instance. Right now he's getting his revolution livened up, tying up to some right good men as I understand it, and hoping the past will be overlooked, but most folks kain't forget that two-three years ago he was raising the devil in the bandit line. It was back of that when you and he were friends, wasn't it?"

"I never knew Villa," the Mexican said shortly.

"That so? Well, one of Pancho's failings has been that he guessed wrong how things were coming out, one time and another. . . . I heard about another Mexican that shore busted things wide open for himself making a bad guess. He guessed, when Pancho was going at his best, that he was going to win, and there wouldn't be any comeback for those that tied up to him. This feller had been supposed to be quite decent. Had a good family and a good practice—I didn't mention he was a lawyer, did I? Yes, he was a lawyer. Got part of his education here in the States. Quite a respected citizen there in Chihuahua."

Villabosa wet this lips.

"That time when Villa and his gang took the

city in Chihuahua where this man lived, folks there had to choose whether they'd tie up to him or stand by old man Carranza. The Carranzistas got out of town—if they could. This lawyer I'm telling you about would naturally have been with the Constitutionalists, I reckon, if it hadn't been for a woman. Not exactly a woman, either; she wasn't more'n a girl, way it was told to me. He'd been trying to make a hit with her for some time, with nothing whatever doing. For one thing, he was about old enough to be her grandfather. For another, she was already in love with a youngster about her own age.

"Well, Villa came in. Some of his *dorados* captured a number of young women, you may have heard. So many, as a matter of fact, that it didn't especially interest Pancho who got some of 'em. And right there was where this lawyer Mexican made his error of judgment. He thought Villa was going to continue to be the big noise not only in Chihuahua but all over Mexico, and he wanted the girl. So he made a trade with Pancho. The lady was his price. Well, when Villa got driven out, there wasn't anything for this Mex lawyer to do but get out, too. He forfeited quite considerable property, to say nothing of having no small number of Constitutionalists telling what they would do to him if they ever got a chance. Julia —— Did I mention that the girl's name was Julia Trejo, a member of that old Trejo family? Julia wasn't with him when he

arrived in Texas. It seems she had committed suicide some time before that. Within a week after Pancho turned her over to you, wasn't it?"

Villabosa did not answer. He was watching Dalton's face as a captured mouse might watch a leisurely cat.

"Oh, yes. I forgot to say that she had a couple of brothers. The young one—named Roberto—wasn't in Chihuahua at that time. The other was trying to prevent Pancho's *dorados* from taking his sister when one of them ran a bayonet through him. You've never met up with any of the Trejo family since then, have you? It will be quite an interesting reunion."

Dalton leaned over and carefully jammed out the fire at the end of his nearly consumed cigarette. Then he rolled another, and all the while Villabosa stared apprehensively, but said not a word. "One of the Carranza officers at Matamoras," Dalton remarked casually, as though it were entirely an afterthought, "is Captain Roberto Trejo."

The prisoner's teeth were showing at the corners of his lips, now, but neither in a smile nor a sneer. Undisguised fear gleamed in his eyes, and his voice shook as he cried, "Not to him!"

"Afraid he'd take too long killing you?" Dalton asked cheerfully. "Well, I reckon you're right. I happened to hear how he said he'd do it, and the programme was quite thorough. However——" The Ranger spread his hands and sat back, inhaling his new cigarette content-

edly. "It's up to you, of course. You can go or stay."

Villabosa's restraint broke, and he cursed in two languages.

"I don't blame you," Dalton said sympathetically. "I'd be a little worked up if I was in your place and was going to be turned over to Roberto Trejo—with handcuffs on."

"I am not, and you know I am not!" Villabosa raged. "You've got me, damn you! But I don't know a thing more about that killing of Puenta than I've told you—except that I did telephone Joe Fong he had the label that had disappeared. I don't know who killed him. I didn't ask. And that is all I can tell, because it is all I know. But as to the diamond——" His face worked convulsively. "I hold you to that promise not to turn me over to Trejo. I'll tell where it is."

Fifteen minutes later Napier asked him a final question:

"Does Charles Toy read Spanish or English, or both?"

"He doesn't speak Spanish. I think he reads English more or less; I don't know how much."

At Napier's request, Dalton got paper, pen and ink. "Write what I dictate," the treasury agent commanded, and Villabosa indited this note:

CHARLES TOY:

My associate at the border has been ar-

rested. His messenger was shot. The officers have the package that is of special value. With my partner under arrest, I fear they will be after me, and I am going to get across into Mexico to-night.

"The idea will be, when you see your old friends again, that you were caught after you wrote this letter and before you could make your get-away," Napier explained. "Also that this note, which you are supposed to have given to a Chinaman, was also seized. Perhaps the Chinaman was arrested. All right; we'll continue:"

The bearer, Charley Chew, happened to be here in Eagle Pass. For value received, I have transferred to him all my interest in the article that is behind the door with the five padlocks, and have given him my key. You will settle with him the same as you would with me if I could get there.

"Sign your name." Villabosa did so, and Napier, as soon as the ink was dry, put the note carefully away in his pocket. "Will you take me to the first train for San Antonio?" he asked Dalton. "I'll get you word as soon as I find whether he has told the truth."

Dalton nodded agreement. "Having gone this far, I'd shorely like to be in with you at the finish," he said regretfully, "but my job is to stay with this *hombre* until we find whether he's overlooked anything or not. If he hasn't, I'll

bring him back to San 'Ntonio. If he has, he and I, with Hard and McQuestion to guard against accidents, will be making a little trip down to the mouth of the Rio Grande."

"Don't worry," Villabosa snarled. "I'm not going to Matamoras."

CHAPTER XXII

Agent Gordon was waiting when Napier's train, in the early evening, pulled into the palm-surrounded station at San Antonio. "Mr. Lamb would have come down to meet you himself," he said, "but a matter came up that is likely to keep him busy all the evening. So he had Carver relieve me from watching Kalat earlier than usual and asked me to express his regrets and do the best I could to take his place. If there is anything that needs his special attention, we can get hold of him, and he can break loose. I've got my own little car here."

When they were seated in it and on their way to the Bonham, Napier briefly put Gordon in touch with such developments of the case as were subsequent to the Eagle Pass incidents. Then he asked, "What has Kalat been doing?"

"Nothing exciting. Wandering around like a lost soul, principally. He has been to the Chinese house every day, and he called at the Bonham once to ask for Villabosa, and since then has telephoned five or six times; I suppose he doesn't want the hotel people to get too familiar with his looks. And, two evenings, he has called on the Glenns at the Edgemont."

"Nothing has happened to the Glenns?"

Gordon looked surprised. "Happened to the Glenns? Not that I know of. The most interesting thing I have observed in keeping track of Kalat is that somebody else is doing it, too. There is another man following him a good deal of the time—especially after dark. A stranger to me. A Mexican. Perhaps his own gang has him under observation."

"It sounds plausible enough," Napier agreed. "Everybody in the gang seems to be double-crossing about everybody else. The common members of the Chinese society don't know that anything is being smuggled except opium. The big Chinks distrust their Mexican friends so much that they don't let them know exactly where they keep the dope, although it is probably somewhere in the big house, seeing that the diamond is there—or was, the last Villabosa knew. The Mexicans are so suspicious of the Chinese that they won't even trust them to keep the jewel in a combination safe. And Kalat seems to have done the most artistic double-crossing of all. He has them believing that the two diamonds he is bringing in are worth about forty thousand apiece, which would make the total duty sixteen thousand dollars. They think he is paying them half the regular duty when he agrees to give them eight thousand for the whole job."

"'Honor among thieves,'" quoted Gordon. "Not."

They came in sight of the Bonham. "What is the programme?" the local agent asked.

"I'm not sure as to all the details yet," Napier told him. "First, if you will, I wish you would go to your office and get that padlock key that Villabosa made such a fuss about when we wouldn't let him keep it. A little later, I'll probably want you to get some men's clothing store friend to open up long enough to let me buy quite a lot of stuff I shall need—and there are things I'll want to get at a drug store, also. I think we could get the diamond without anything more complicated than an ordinary raid, but that wouldn't get the men that are involved, or produce the evidence to convict them. We have to catch them all together and with their keys in their pockets. And that means—I have been trying to think of some other way, and there isn't any—that I've got to do an absolutely fool thing. For the third time in my life."

"Remarkable record," Gordon grinned.

"The third time I've done this one particular fool thing," Napier amended, smiling with him. "It worked the other two times, which makes the odds all the bigger against its working again. However —— It couldn't be done in the daytime, of course, but perhaps I can get away with it by artificial light."

"The details sound feasible," Gordon agreed dryly.

"You won't think so when you see me with my hair coarsened up with that sticky stuff from the drug store, and an artistic and quite hopeless attempt to make my eyes look as if they were

almond-shaped. You will think it is crazy, wild, foolish Old Sleuth stuff, which we know isn't really done."

Gordon was plainly surprised. "Letting your whiskers grow and dressing like a bum and griming up with dirt, I guess we've all done that at one time or another," he said, "but I've always supposed no American or European could act or talk like a Chinaman well enough to fool a real one. And you've got away with it twice, you say?"

"Not as a regular Chinaman. I don't believe that could be done,—by any one except Nick Carter,—and if it could, I certainly don't talk the language well enough to do it. But an American-born, half-breed Chinaman, educated in the San Francisco schools and who has never been to China, is a little different. Making breaks with the language is discounted in that case, and that leaves the success of the experiment largely dependent on looks and manners. And the office corner there in Charles Toy's restaurant isn't very brightly lighted."

He grimaced. "But I don't like the idea. It is bound to fail if I meet anybody who ever saw me before, which means Kalat, for one. And it is not only a ticklish job to get away with, but I'll feel like an imitation of a dime-novel deteckertif from the minute I begin it until I get it finished, if I have that much luck. Yet it is the only way I can see to get them all together, and if it fails we aren't any worse off as regards

making a quick raid for the diamond. Come back as soon as you get the key, will you, and come right up? I'll know by then what I'm going to do and when I'm going to do it."

The moment he was in his room he called the Edgemont.

"Miss Glenn?" he asked, when her voice came over the wire. "I've just got back to town. I hope it isn't too late."

"No," she said, and even in the monosyllable was such a note of relief and pleasure that he beamed fatuously at the transmitter. "Where are you?"

"In my room at the Bonham."

"Will you please hang up and wait a few minutes? I'll call you."

The bell jangled before he had fairly begun to unpack his bag.

"I am downstairs at the booth," she said. "I didn't want to talk from the room. I was afraid of disturbing my father. He is — lying down."

"I must have seemed terribly curt, the other night, but trains won't wait, and my trip couldn't possibly be postponed. I can't tell you how sorry I was that I couldn't come."

"It's all right. I knew you were from your voice. And now will do just as well."

"Shall I come this evening? Say, in half an hour or so?"

Miss Glenn hesitated. "I couldn't see you here. Could we ride a little way? We couldn't

be gone long; I have to get back to father; he isn't very well."

"I'll be there with a car at half-past eight, if that is agreeable."

"I'll be ready."

Gordon came in while he was hastily getting into clean linen.

"Can I borrow your car?" Napier asked him abruptly. "I have an errand that would call for a deaf and dumb chauffeur, and I don't know any. I won't be gone an hour, probably. It's a nervy thing to ask, but ——"

"No nerve at all. You can't do anything to that car that I haven't. Sure you can have it."

"And while I'm gone you had better round up some of our fellows, as many as you can get, and have them ready for a sudden call. Better have one of them go over and keep an eye on the Chinese house. We may want to call there in force later in the night. The others can just stick around where they can be got at. And then maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea to get in touch with the chief of police and see if we can have two or three of his men if we need them. There are at least four people to catch, and several ways to get out of that house; it will need to be well surrounded."

"Better one too many than one too few," Gordon agreed. "I'll attend to it. And that men's clothing chap that you mentioned?"

"Yes. If he will be at his store at a little

after nine —— It may be nine-thirty before I get back, but I shall come as soon as I can."

"He won't mind waiting; he's a good friend of mine."

"I'll meet you here at the hotel. And I'll try to bring Tin Lizzie back with all her cylinders and wheels in their normal places. Has she got any especial peculiarity?"

"She rattles."

"I said *especial* peculiarity."

They went down in the elevator. As they were passing the desk, a clerk called to Napier.

"A lady was here asking for you twice yesterday," he said, low-voiced. "Late in the afternoon and again in the evening. She was here again this afternoon. We couldn't tell her when you would be in, of course. She did not care to leave her name."

"What sort of looking lady?" Napier asked.

"Very dark. Very dark indeed. Spanish, perhaps, although she had no accent."

"Thank you. If she should come in again, tell her I am back, will you, and that she can find me here any time to-morrow."

He rejoined Gordon, and they went out and up the side street to where the treasury agent had parked his car. Gordon warned him regarding two or three traffic rules which differ substantially from most Eastern regulations, advised him as to the quantity of gas on hand, remarked cheerfully that the left rear tire might last forever but

was much more likely to give out inside of five miles, and let him depart.

Miss Glenn was waiting in the Edgemont entrance. They spoke only commonplaces until they had reached a suburb. Then she said:

"I have to get back; I mustn't leave father too long. Do you suppose you could find some wide place where we won't be disturbed, and pull up by the side of the road? Perhaps you would rather not drive and listen, too." She laughed a little. "Not while driving somebody else's car for the first time, over roads you never saw before, anyway."

He admitted the reasonableness of this, found a place where there was little traffic, drew up at the side, and shut off his power. She did not speak at once, clearly at a loss exactly how to begin. "I hope I can be of some real help to you," he said, to make it easier.

"It will help me merely to tell it," she replied. "I don't know whether you can advise me or not, but just knowing that you are also considering what I ought to do will relieve my mind. I have borne it alone just as long as I can."

He waited sympathetically.

"I might as well confess what is at the bottom of it all and have it over with," she went on, after a few seconds, with manifest reluctance. "It—it is a family skeleton. My father —— My father has a terrible disease, Mr. Napier. He is addicted to a drug."

She found words more easily now that the

worst was told. "It is of old standing. He became addicted in the Philippines, after he was wounded. You believe that using opium is a disease, don't you?"

"That is recognized by almost everybody, these days."

"He has tried to be cured. Nobody can ever know how hard he has tried. But he has always gone back. And now —— You can't imagine how I hate to tell you this, but he is in danger. He is in danger of doing something that all the money in the world wouldn't have induced him to do when he was himself. He isn't himself at all, you know. When he cannot get the drug ——"

"I know," Napier assured her gently. "They are not really to blame for what they do then."

"There never was a better father," she said. "My mother died when I was five years old, and he was mother and father both. We were chums. I was almost grown when he came out of the hospital and found that he couldn't give up the drug. It is so easy for one to get it over there in the East, in some forms. After a while ——" She paused, then went on bravely, "After a while it got the better of him and he left the army. From that day until now he has—he has never been better."

"The danger?" Napier prompted her.

"He found a place here where he could get it. From Chinese. And then, after a while, they wanted him to help them distribute it. He said he wouldn't, of course, and they shut down on

his supply. You can imagine the result. All they had to do was let him have it in such small quantities that he would never be quite satisfied, vary this some days by refusing to give him any—they said they didn't have it—and wait. You know how a Chinaman can wait."

"I know."

"So finally he told them he would do it. And I know perfectly well he cannot. Not only has he promised to break the law, but he hasn't the brain power, any longer, to do it successfully. I know how the officers trace back the way the addicts get their supply. He is certain to be caught." She hesitated. "It is an awful thing that he should be willing to do it, but I know it isn't his real self who has promised; it is the slave to the drug. It would be terrible enough to have him working for these Chinamen, doing an illegal thing, but if he were detected, and I know he would be sooner or later, I couldn't bear it. I can't sleep without dreaming of him under arrest. In prison." She shuddered.

"Had you thought of anything I can do?" Napier asked.

"No, except that you might be able to advise me. He promised to take a lot of opium North and deliver it to various people—mostly Chinese—in several cities. They want us to start soon. He promised, and then he told me; you know, perhaps, that they babble sometimes when they are under the influence. And I waited until he was more himself and pleaded with him, and

he went to them and refused. So they merely cut off his supply again. He had enough on hand for three days, and to-day is the third day. He is sleeping now, and when he wakes there will be no more. He will struggle—a little while. But in the end it is always the same. I cannot hope that he won't go back to those Chinamen, sooner or later, and beg for opium—and do exactly as they say to pay for it." She sighed, a hopeless, pathetic sigh. "Poor old daddy!" she breathed. "He can't help it. He is just a poor sick wreck of a man, with no resistance left. And he isn't ever going to be any better; I know that. What can I do to save him from himself?"

"A good doctor might ——" Napier began, but she interrupted him: "We have had the best there are. Nobody knows how much he has suffered during some of his treatments. He won't do it again. It has gone too far."

"You say he has no supply? I take it, from that, they have not yet turned over to him the stock they want him to distribute."

"No. They have some plan, when they do that, to protect themselves against his taking it for himself. They know addicts too well to trust them."

So there was no evidence against himself in Captain Glenn's possession, and he had not yet made himself amenable to any law. Napier tremendously wanted to assure the girl that he hoped, within a day, perhaps within a few hours, to remove this particular danger, but it could not

be done. He wondered if she, as well as Madame Frezzi, had learned of his connection with the government. He put out a suggestion that ought to determine it.

"If you knew any one who had influence with any treasury official ——" he mused, and left the sentence unfinished. If she knew he was a treasury agent she would believe he was intimating that he might be able to exercise some pull to save the situation and would leap enthusiastically at the idea.

"I don't," she replied. "And if I did, they wouldn't do it. I can't blame them. It is their duty. No. There isn't any hope in that direction."

"It is a tough problem," Napier admitted. "There doesn't seem to be any answer to it, not right off the reel, anyway. Perhaps, if I can sleep on it and think it over, something will come to me that I can advise. It has gone several days without coming to a crisis. Probably a little more delay won't make it any worse."

"I hoped I had it all worked out, a week ago," she said. "I thought I had found a way." There was a trace of bitterness in her next words. "But I hadn't. I had forgotten that 'East is East and West is West.'"

He looked at her inquiringly, and she saw she ought to explain.

"There is a man connected in some way with those Chinamen," she said, "whom I used to know. He is a Turk and his name is Yusef

Kalat. Yusef Kalat Bey. I knew him in China, years ago."

Napier was himself astonished at the delighted relief that came over him at her words. She didn't know that Kalat had been made a pasha, and Kalat had not been confidential enough with her to tell her.

"Twice, lately, father has got away from me at night," she was going on, "and, both times, I found him at the place where the Chinamen are. Both times, also, I found Kalat Bey there, and he rode home with us. Father remembered him, of course, and was glad to see him. He has called on us several times and was very kind and thoughtful. He isn't going by his real name, by the way, because he was afraid, he says, he would be interned if we had gone to war with Turkey. He came to America before we were in the war at all. He is passing as a Spaniard."

She did not seem to think it important to mention Kalat's pseudonym, and Napier did not ask it.

"After a day or two—he was so friendly—I asked him to use his influence with the Chinese to have them release father from his promise. He said he would." She hesitated, then went on, "But that is over. He won't. I had been living so long in America that I had begun to forget the ways of the East. Kalat Bey helped to remind me that 'never the twain shall meet.' Now he is more likely to harm us than help us." Napier did not ask her why, but she told him. "He

became tiresome—and finally insulting. He will not come again, I think."

"I have an idea," Napier told her. He could not be definite. "If it works, and I believe it will, I want you to go home and rest comfortably to-night, Miss Glenn, without bad dreams. Your father isn't going to prison. He isn't even going to be in danger of going. I feel sure of it. I will see you to-morrow."

"But what is the idea? How will it ——"

"You will agree it is a practical one when I tell you. Will you trust me if I don't explain it now?"

"I would like to know, but if you think it best ——"

"Trust me, please," he urged. "Believe that I shall do everything I can—and that I shall succeed."

The confidence in his voice had its effect. "I do," she told him. "Somehow, I do. You don't know what a relief it has been to tell you and to feel that the worry from now on isn't all mine. You see there hasn't been anybody I could talk with or ask for advice. There never has. For years father and I have been alone. I couldn't make friends, without their finding out about his failing. Do you know, I haven't one close friend in the world."

"*Didn't* have," Napier corrected her.

"Didn't have," she repeated, smiling a bit tremulously.

CHAPTER XXIII

Madame Frezzi, waiting in a little reception room where the entrance to the elevators was under her eye, stepped swiftly out as Napier came hurrying into the Bonham. He turned at the touch of her hand on his arm and with difficulty refrained from exclaiming at her changed appearance. She looked ten years older than when he had last seen her, a week before.

That art must have much to do with her continued youthful appearance he had vaguely realized, but he had never guessed how much. This night she had neglected all her customary artifices of the toilet, and the result was almost startling.

There was no responding smile on her face at his polite greeting, and her voice was determined and tense:

"I must see you alone. Where can we talk and be undisturbed?"

For reply, he motioned toward the elevator, which had descended and was discharging its passengers. She preceded him into it and at the first stop he ushered her out into the mezzanine balcony. There were numbers of people there, but most of them were grouped where they could look down on the lobby, and he led her to a dis-

tant corner where they would be out of hearing and not conspicuous.

"You won't think I am discourteous, I hope," he said, as he placed a chair for her and took a seat facing it, "but I have to be economical of my time, just at this moment. I have some work to do ——"

She interrupted him.

"You *will* have some work to do after you have listened to me. Whatever thing you are working on will not be of great importance compared to what I am going to tell you."

Now he observed that the contrast between this woman and the Madame Frezzi with whom he had talked in the garden was not merely physical. She was not only altered in outward appearance, but beneath externals he was conscious of some other change,—psychological, perhaps spiritual. Her black eyes were somber and her voice pitched in a deeper key. There was nothing of the fiery passion that she had displayed when the malicious acquaintance had telephoned her that Kalat was playing the squire to a younger and more beautiful woman, but in the repression of her tones, no less than in the set, unsmiling lines of her face, Napier sensed a burning, unrelenting glow of vindictive determination. With his eyes on hers, he bowed and waited.

"Did you ever hear of a Turk named Yusef Kalat Pasha?"

"Yes."

"He is Sastanada."

Napier tried to let his face express the right degree of surprise, but he did not speak. She was continuing, in a low monotone:

" He is working with a group of Chinese and Mexican smugglers, and they are bringing into this country two diamonds that are called the Gorgeous Lily and the Ray of Light. Kalat looted them from the sultan's sash. One of them is already in; it is here in San Antonio, at a house over in the Chinese quarter. The other is to be brought in very soon. It is at Piedras Negras."

"And Kalat? Why didn't he bring them himself?"

" He came in with a false passport, as a Greek, through Mexico. He knew he would be searched, and he had no familiarity with your border and the ways of your customs officers. So he left the stones at Piedras Negras with Chinamen that he could trust. They belong to a society that he had done business with when he was in China."

"And the place where the stone is? The one that has reached here?"

She described the great house. " There are a number of Chinese interested with Kalat," she added. " I know the name of only one of them. It is Charles Toy. He is the proprietor of a restaurant. The Mexican who was killed was a messenger who came and went between him and Kalat. He had brought word to Kalat, that night, to come to the Chinese house at once, and Kalat had gone there, when I got him to take my message to you."

"How do you come to know all this?"

"Kalat and I ——" She hesitated. "We have been friends for a number of years. He knew I was in America. He sent for me to join him here." She paused, seemed to be considering whether it was worth while to conceal anything whatever, and then went on in the same toneless voice, "He said, after this matter of the diamonds had been settled and he had found a place to remain in America, that we would be married."

"And something has happened to change the programme?"

"To make it impossible."

She did not explain. Her mind was in a single groove,—the betrayal of the man she had recently wanted to marry. Napier wondered what ignition of jealousy could be responsible for such a desperate turning against him.

"Why did you send Puenta to find me, a week ago Monday night?" he asked.

"I told you the truth about that; at least, I told you part of the truth. I had heard from Kalat that Captain Glenn was concerned with the Chinese smugglers; that he had met him at their house. And I wanted him removed." She replied simply and promptly to Napier's look of inquiry, "Because I wanted his daughter removed. If he were taken away, she would go. When Kalat joined us, that night of the parade, just after I saw you, he came in an automobile with Glenn and the girl. I saw him bid her

good night. I saw how he looked at her. I know Yusef Kalat."

She smiled a little, bitterly. "And I was right. I have had him followed, since then, and I was right. Well, what of it? You are thinking that this has something to do with my coming to you to-night and telling you about Kalat and his smuggling, and you are mistaken. I was jealous, but I am not jealous any more. Jealous!" She laughed; a mirthless, dreary laugh. "As if I could hold him, when I am almost old enough to be her mother! But one must care, to be jealous. I do not care for Yusef Kalat." She leaned forward and her suppressed voice fell still lower. "I want you to get him and his diamonds. I want him sent to prison. Better still, I would like to have him turned over to the Allies. To those who are going to punish Turks for what they did to the weak peoples, during the war. Do you suppose you could do that?"

For the first time Napier sensed that this, indeed, was not a jealous woman; that the motive which had impelled her when she sent for him before was not the urge that was driving her now. It is something more than pathetic, it is something tragic, when a woman of her type suddenly determines not only to confess her increasing years but to look them, but back of her changed manner and appearance, back of her tense, low monotone, he grasped a deeper, more hopeless tragedy than the loss of a lover or the sudden realization of a forever vanished youth. It came

to him that her smouldering eyes were the eyes of an Oriental fanatic. This was not jealousy; it was cold, remorseless hate.

"What has he done to you?" he asked.

"The news came yesterday," she replied, without emotion. "In a letter in yesterday morning's mail. He does not know I have it. I have tried four times to find you. . . . My father, my mother, my brother and two sisters. They have been dead more than two years, and Kalat told me, only three weeks ago, that he had seen them just before he left Turkey and that they were all well. Well and happy, he said.

"I am Armenian. My father was a trusted effendi of the sultan. He sent me to be educated in Italy and France. I came back to Constantinople. I met Kalat. . . . It was some time afterward that he proposed I do secret work. You did not know I represented the Turkish government, of course; you supposed, if you heard anything about me at all, that I was in the Italian service. That was what we wanted everybody to believe. . . . The war came. Then the massacres. Kalat promised me he himself would see to the safety of my family. He has assured me, all along, that they were all hidden and safe. He even gave me messages, three weeks ago, that he said they sent me just before he left. Not in writing, of course; he couldn't bring writing. . . . Two years my father has been dead, and my mother, and my brother and sisters. But my sisters did not die at once. . . .

And Yusef Kalat was there, in Constantinople, with power, and did not raise his hand to save them. . . . I thought, at first, I would kill him, but that would be too quick."

She sat a moment looking at the floor. "Is there anything more I can tell you, to make his punishment more certain?" she asked dully.

"I am very sorry," he said.

She raised her eyes, and they were as hard as her voice. "I do not want sympathy," she replied. "I want Yusef Kalat to suffer."

"I shall do what I can," he promised her.

Tung Sheng sat in the little office in the corner of Charles Toy's restaurant when Napier entered. It was long after the early evening rush and not quite time for the arrival of after-theater patrons, and few people were at the tables. The proprietor was not in evidence.

Napier felt morally certain that the tint of his face and hands and the coarse stiffness of his black hair were artistic enough to pass muster anywhere by artificial light, and his good ready-made clothes were well in character, but the shading that gave his eyes and cheek bones as much a Chinese appearance as was necessary for a half-caste was a different matter, and he was glad to observe not only that the office corner was dimly lighted, but that the principal electric lamp, over the cashier's desk where Tung Sheng sat, was green-shaded. He stood with his face as much in the shadow as was possible, without empha-

sizing his dislike for illumination, and addressed Toy's manager in his best Cantonese:

"Is this the honorable Charles Toy?"

"No," Tung replied. "He is here, in back. He will be out in a moment. I am Tung Sheng."

"I am Chu Chang," Napier said. "Formerly of San Francisco, where I was born. Also I am called Charley Chew. I have come from the river, where I met a Mexican named Villabosa." He took pains to pronounce the Spanish name not as well as an American could, but a little better than would most Chinese, in accordance with his pose as one who was better versed in English than in the language of his fathers.

Tung Sheng's face was expressionless, and he did not reply.

"If you could get Charles Toy at once," Napier went on, "I have a message for him that needs to be acted on quickly, I think. You, also, are interested in the message. And another. One Joe Fong."

Tung called to a waiter and sent him to summon the pair. The old restaurant keeper came through from the direction of the kitchen, a moment later, followed by the Chinese-Mexican Fong. Tung Sheng made his introduction laconic and without significance, but Napier thought a sign passed between them as he spoke:

"This is Chu Chang, once of San Francisco. He comes from the river, he says, with a message." To Napier he said, "This is Ng Choy, who is called Charles Toy."

"I cannot bear it!" Napier exclaimed, with his best Chinese etiquette. "Even the sound of your name stuns me."

"I am too greatly honored. I do not deserve it," Ng Choy replied.

"And this is Joe Fong," Tung Sheng said. Napier spoke with politeness to him, also, but the reply was muttered and most perfunctory. The upbringing of Joe Fong, obviously, had not been well attended to.

Napier looked about to see that no waiters were within hearing. Then he took from his pocket the note Villabosa had written and passed it to the old Chinaman, who read it slowly. Some of the words seemed to give him trouble and he looked up at Napier. "Do you read English well?" he asked.

"My education is public school," Napier replied, with just the touch of pride that he thought an American-born Chinaman might have used, glad of the opportunity to again emphasize the reason for such inaccuracies of Cantonese tone shading as they all—at least the two older men—must already have observed.

"Read this to us aloud, in our own tongue."

Napier translated it. The faces of both Ng Choy and Tung Sheng remained without expression as he read, but Joe Fong scowled angrily. He did not speak, however, but waited for his elders. Ng Choy took back the note when Napier had finished, and studied it through his big glasses, locating and defining for himself the

words that the translation had made clearer. When he had finished, he looked blandly at Napier and asked:

"Did he go to Mexico?"

"I do not know. He was to attempt it after dark. He had no pass. I came away."

"You are to receive, he says, what he was to receive. What is that?"

"It was to be three thousand dollars for him and his friend Flores, when both stones were delivered. He supposed, for one, it would be fifteen hundred."

"And your arrangement with him?" It was Joe Fong who asked this question. "What was your arrangement with him?"

Napier gestured toward the note. "Value received," he said. Ng Choy nodded quietly, approving of the answer as adequate.

"I do not enjoy this transferring of interest from one to another," Joe Fong said. His look was hostile; it was the dislike of the Mexican half of him for the gringo half of this ex-San Francisco public-school graduate.

"What is past is not of mighty importance," Tung Sheng said. "It is gone. The present is here, and the future approaches."

"Where did you say this stone you speak of is?" Ng Choy asked.

"In the safe with five padlocks," Napier told him promptly. "One key is in the hands of each of you, one key in the hands of Sas'anada, and one"—he produced the flat key that

had been taken from Villabosa — "in my hands, as this writing says. And if I may speak in the presence of those so much older and wiser ——"

"Go on," said Ng Choy.

"It would be well to use the five keys and complete the bargain that was made with Sas'anada very soon. The officials of the government may be able to learn where the stone is. It would be better if we had delivered it and received payment before that."

"The words sound wise," Ng Choy replied. "What is your province?"

"I have never been in China. My honorable father was a Saitsiu man."

"And your business?"

"I am an obscure and often unsuccessful speculator," Napier said. He knew the others would take this to mean that he was a fairly well-to-do gambler.

Ng Choy thought a moment. "The words *are* wise," he said. "Go, Joe Fong, and see if you can get Sas'anada on the telephone. Tell him he must be at the place of the safe at twelve o'clock." He turned to Napier. "Whether we find him by telephone, or whether we have to search, we will have him there. Will you wait here and go with us, or shall I describe how to find the place?"

"If the safe has not been moved, I know the place and how to find it," Napier replied. "In the great house, Villabosa said, in the dark wine

closet that opens from the little sitting-room off what once was the dance hall."

"He has instructed you well," the old man said. "The outer door will open to your ring at twelve o'clock."

Napier murmured the proper words called for by politeness and thankfully passed from the restaurant without once looking back. He had succeeded in deceiving them all in that dim light, and perhaps he could continue to deceive them in the brighter light of the great house, but he did not for a moment believe he would look like any one but Julian Napier to one who already knew him. He must continue to utilize the disguise to enter the headquarters of the Chinese, but it would be quite valueless the moment he came face to face with Kalat.

Gordon, fifteen minutes later, set out to gather his forces as speedily as possible. There would be two other customs agents and four policemen. The great house would be under surveillance from all sides before half-past eleven.

"That will be enough," Napier told him. "According to Villabosa, we will have only four men to deal with. As all the other Chinese ordinarily in the house are members of the society and supposed to have an interest in all smuggling, it is necessary to get them out when the diamonds are being dealt in. When the five gathered to put the first stone in the safe and each lock it with his own key, Villabosa says there was not another Chinaman in the house, not even Wang Ting,

who is the confidential top servant. Tung Sheng or Joe Fong tended the door."

They spoke of the details of surrounding the house, and Napier arranged to meet Gordon there at a little before midnight to receive his report and give any further instructions that might become necessary. Then he went to the grocery of Kwong Yet, who came quickly to his tap on the door and low-voiced hail, and old Kwong Li and his nephew almost allowed their eyes to express surprise at the changes in his appearance when he came into the light of the little back room.

"This seems to be foolishness," Napier said. "It would not deceive you. But once to-night it has deceived men who do not know me, and it will be again useful, later."

"It is excellently done," old Kwong conceded. "If your speech did not betray you ——" He hastened to make polite explanation. "You speak our tongue beautifully, but there are fourteen tones in the Cantonese, and it is not to be expected that any ——"

"Barbarian," Napier supplied, smiling, as the old man hesitated. "I have not claimed to be of China, but only half Chinese."

"The endurance of a horse is determined by how far it can go. If it succeeded ——" He dismissed the subject. "We have wondered why you have been so long in coming."

"I have been out of the city. What have you learned?"

"Not much, and yet a thing that seems to me to be a matter for satisfaction. Six men, it will be remembered, were picked to wait for the Mexican messenger as he came toward the great house, that night. None of them has said that he did it. Yet this we know, that when the men were being given the places to lie in wait, one of them said that the Mexican was accustomed to bear messages to a certain house and had fallen into the habit of always coming past that house on his way to and from this quarter, and Joe Fong spoke and said that he would wait in that path."

"And it was by that route that he came, and in that path that he was killed."

Kwong Li inclined his head. "So we know what befell, although it is not evidence such as satisfies judges."

"It may be that I can make use of it," Napier said. "I have a thought that I may be able to make use of it to-night. In the meantime, there is another thing. A number of men you have named to me as members of the Society of the Fragrant Lily, and yet there is another whose name you have not given. Who is Wu Tsai?"

To his uncle's inquiring look, the younger Chinaman shook his head in the negative. "I have never heard the name here," he said.

Napier produced the complete orange label that had marked the tin brought in by Sanders. "Here is the address," he said. "The package bearing this label was to have been delivered to

the great house. ' To the Honorable Wu Tsai,' is its reading."

Kwong Li took the paper and held it before his eyes under the light. A whimsical smile wrinkled the corners of his lips. " In learning to read our characters, you were being instructed by one who spoke the official tongue, were you not? " he asked.

" Yes."

" You think, then, when you read, in Mandarin. You do not think in Cantonese."

Napier agreed that this was undoubtedly true, in so far as he thought in Chinese at all; he admitted, in reading, he usually had to translate and think in English.

" It is explained," the old Chinaman said. " These characters read ' Wu Tsai,' in Mandarin, as you thought, but in Cantonese one speaks them ' Ng Choy.' " He handed back the label. " The number of men you seek is not increased."

With thanks and protestations of regret that he must hasten, Napier moved toward the door. Kwong Yet spoke:

" If it is permissible, one question. You said you might make use of information to-night. And that this masquerade had succeeded once and might again. Might I ask if men—including the enemy of this house, who mocked my uncle—are to be seized to-night? I would like to be near to hear the news early, if so. Is the question permissible? "

Napier hesitated, and old Kwong saved him

the necessity of a direct reply by quoting sententiously from the Analects:

"'The superior man acts before he speaks, and afterward speaks according to his actions.'"

"Thank you, Kwong Li," Napier said. "Those are wise words. Nevertheless"—he smiled at Kwong Yet—"it is a warm night, and pleasant, with many stars. A pleasant night to remain awake for a time. News might come to one who sat before his door, in the darkness."

Both Chinese bowed grave appreciation, and the elder said, "Good news would be worth sleeplessness, even to one who is old, as I am; sleeplessness even unto the dawn."

CHAPTER XXIV

UNDER the very mulberry tree where he had stood when he made the violent acquaintance of Villabosa, Napier found Gordon.

"Three Chinamen have gone in," the agent whispered. "Toy and two others; probably your two; I have seen them at the restaurant. And two others have come out, since Toy went in, and gone away."

"You haven't seen anything of Kalat?"

"Here he comes now."

The Turk turned into the broad beam of light that streamed down the walk from the cluster of incandescents over the door. He went up the steps, rang, and there was a slight delay before he was admitted.

"Nobody to tend the door, as we expected," Napier said. "Whoever opened it came from some distance away. I'll wait, now, until they have a chance to get to wherever the meeting is held—in that little room out of which the wine closet opens, probably—and then I'll go around and come up the walk openly. The instant the door has closed behind me, come as fast as you can. Who is the other man that will be with you?"

"Carver. He is over behind that little house

on the next corner. When he sees me start he'll come."

"Leave him at the door, after you get in, and go with me yourself. Your other man and the police understand what they are to do."

"They will close in immediately. Anybody who gets out of the house cannot help being taken."

"All right," Napier agreed, satisfied. "I'll be starting."

At the door, after ringing, he had to wait a moment, as had Kalat. When it opened, he faced Tung Sheng. He stepped inside, and the Chinaman saw to the closing and fastening of the door. Then he took a step or two to precede Napier into a wide, garish room that opened to the right off the front hall, and as he did so the doorbell rang again.

The Chinaman turned quickly and leaned forward, his back to Napier, to inspect this new arrival through an ingeniously concealed peephole by the side of the door. His eye had not reached it when the hard muzzle of a pistol pressed against the back of his neck and Napier whispered, "Not a sound! Open the door."

A brief second Tung Sheng hesitated, then obeyed. Gordon came in noiselessly. Beyond him, near the edge of the lawn, another man could be seen running toward the house on the grass.

"Look for weapons and handcuff him," Napier commanded, under his breath. "Leave him here, then, with Carver. It won't take but a

minute or two. Then come on through that big room. I'd better not wait; they may be getting suspicious."

He turned and entered the big, over-decorated room, which in a past day had been the dancing apartment of "Harmony Palace." On the farther side, beyond a piano, a door stood open and voices came from beyond it. Napier crossed the dance hall and stood in the doorway.

Across from him sat Ng Choy, at ease, calm and impassive. Joe Fong, beside him, was fidgeting. At a little distance, Kalat stood with his elbow on a mantel. Napier thought that the older Chinaman had been telling him the story of Villabosa's message, a guess that was proven true by Ng Choy's first words. Kalat, in the face of the news that one of the jewels had been seized and that he must hasten to get the other away, with a possibility of close pursuit, was alarmed and nervous.

Beyond Ng Choy, a door stood wide into what looked like another small room, but which Napier knew was the big windowless wine closet that had served the house in its day of notoriety. A single electric light, hanging from a cord in the center of the closet, illuminated it, and in plain sight from where Napier stood was the safe.

Exactly that kind of safe had never come under his eyes before, although he knew they were not rare in Mexican cities where many Chinese are included in the same business community. The original cause for such receptacles,

he had been told, was a grouping together of several small Chinese merchants to buy and use a safe that none of them, as an individual, needed or could afford; later it had become something of a custom, in a country where they did not trust either banks or safe deposit boxes, for money and other valuables in which several men had a joint interest to be put in such a safe, to which one could gain access only in the presence of all the other partners.

It looked, except for its face, not unlike any other iron safe two feet and a half tall. Its door, however, boasted no combination dial. Instead, there extended from the left-hand side, lacing across the crack of the door, one below the other, five hasps. Each ended at a staple that was firmly imbedded in the door, and at each staple was a padlock. Only when all five keys were present at the same time could the safe be opened.

All this he took in at a glance, while Ng Choy was saying:

"And here he is. Charley Chew, this is Misser Sas'anada."

Kalat looked, looked harder, and froze into astonished but wary immobility.

"What does this mean?" he demanded. "This is an American—named Napier."

"Keep your hands away from your pockets," Napier commanded. "It means you are under arrest. I am a Federal officer." He shifted his eyes to the two Chinese and changed to their tongue, so there could be no misunderstanding.

"Don't make any move to get a weapon. It would be dangerous."

Over his shoulder they saw the face of Gordon, who had come across the dance hall noiselessly. Napier stepped into the room, and Gordon took his place in the doorway.

"What is this for?" demanded Joe Fong, his face black with anger. "We have done nothing."

"As to the others, it is for evading duties," Napier told him. "As to you, there is something else to explain. You work about a kitchen too much, Joe Fong, where you are constantly getting grease on your hands, to take a chance with finger prints. It is too easy to get a picture of your fingers. When you throw anything over a wall, at night, you should be sure the same marks are not on it that you leave on pots and pans and plates and tables."

"It is not mine!" Fong shouted. "I did not throw any knife over a wall. I had no knife."

The countenance of Ng Choy was as bland and expressionless as ever. "So," he murmured in his own tongue. "It was done well and thoroughly. I congratulate you. I especially congratulate you"—his voice was mild and amiable, but his eyes, on Napier's face, were flat and opaque—"that no one of us guessed your occupation when you were at the restaurant. If so, some accident might have befallen you before now."

Napier ignored the old Chinaman. "We'll see what kind of firearms or knives they carry ——" he began, to Gordon, when there came an interruption. The doorbell rang, a confusion of voices arose at the outer door, and a voice that was strange to Napier shouted angrily, commandingly, but nevertheless with a queer note of pleading, "I've got to come in. I've got to see Toy. Damn it, man, don't tell me I can't! Tell him it's Captain Glenn. Tell him I've changed my mind. Don't stand there arguing. Great God, man, I can't wait, and I won't!"

"Let him come in," Napier told Gordon, who went to pass the word to Carver. A moment later Glenn came hurrying into the room, the treasury agent behind him.

The captain had unquestionably been a handsome man in his youth. Now he was thin almost to the point of emaciation, his face was haggard and lined, his eyes burned feverishly and his tongue continually moistened his lips. He seemed quite unconscious that the presence of strangers might have any significance, for he began talking to Ng Choy the moment he came within sight and hearing.

"I'll do it," he called. "I've changed my mind. Give me a little dope, Toy. Hurry! We'll talk afterward."

Ng Choy did not take the trouble to answer him.

"Good heavens, man, don't sit there looking at

me!" Glenn cried. "I'm dying for it. I can't wait."

"After a little, we'll see what we can do," Napier said, and Glenn seemed to see him for the first time. "For the moment, you will have to wait. We are Federal officers."

"Federal officers," the ex-captain repeated dully. He looked blankly from Napier to Gordon. Then, as it drifted into his harrowed consciousness that this was a raid, his only reaction to the fact was despairing disappointment. "You mean he can't give me any? You mean you won't let him give me any? For the love of mercy, my friend, let him get me just a little." He panted, licking his lips. "Just a little," he pleaded. "Please. For God's sake, a little."

It was shameful, and rather horrible. Napier, who had sympathy with all drug addicts, tried to soothe him. "I think we can manage it, after a while," he said. "I'll have a doctor here, and he will tell us ——"

"After a while! A doctor! Don't you understand, Mr. Officer? I can't wait. I've been without it since five o'clock. It's too long! Please, sir."

Again the doorbell rang, and from the front came Agent Carver's voice:

"It's a lady named Frezzi, Billy. She says if we tell Mr. Napier she is here, he will let her come in."

"All right," Napier called. His eyes were on

Kalat, whose face displayed surprise, puzzlement and hope. Glenn, for the moment, was ignored. He stood to one side, muttering. The fullness of the situation seemed to have penetrated his dulled understanding. "After a while," Napier heard him say. "We'll have some after a while."

Madame Frezzi stood in the doorway. Napier had thought she might have some information that he needed to know, but her eyes swept past him and rested on Kalat.

"I want you to know that I did it, Yusef," she cried harshly. "*I* did it. *I.*"

His eyes narrowed, but he did not reply. He seemed stunned by her words and the cold passion behind them.

"You have been followed lately, Yusef," she went on, "and just now the follower came to me and said you were here, and that the raid had started. So I had to come and see you under arrest. I wanted to enjoy it." Her set face gave no evidence of enjoyment. "You are under arrest, and you are going back to Turkey to be tried. If the Allies cannot prove you had anything to do with the massacres, the Turks will take care of you for stealing the diamonds. And I did it. You didn't think I would ever turn against you, did you, Yusef? You didn't think I would go to the police, and tell them all I knew. But you didn't know that I would ever hear about my father, and my mother, and my brother and sisters. I hope they torture you, as your

The pistol was in Fong's hand, and Glenn's fingers were clutched around it. *Page 289.*

filthy friends tortured the Christians. I hope ——"

He leaped at her, snarling, and Napier met him with a blow under the ear that sent him reeling against the wall. Then, while Gordon's eyes were also on the Turk, Joe Fong saw his chance, pulled an automatic pistol, and fired.

Napier and Gordon, whirling at the shot and reaching for their own weapons, saw the Chinese-Mexican and Captain Glenn at grips in the middle of the floor, and the face of the captain was slowly whitening, as though a fine powder were being dusted upon it. The pistol was in Fong's hand, and Glenn's fingers were clutched around it. At the instant they looked, Fong fired again, pointblank against Glenn's breast, and the captain staggered and his knees bent, but he did not release his hold. With a terrific effort, he twisted Fong's hand back and upward, and the muzzle swung until it stared fairly into the half-caste's face. Then Glenn's fingers pressed over Fong's, and there was a third explosion, and Fong slumped inert to the floor, while the pistol fell between them.

The three shots and all the struggle that intervened had not taken the tenth of a minute.

The captain was spent; his last ounce of strength and will were gone. He collapsed, still breathing, but faintly, as Napier caught him and let him back on a couch. Gordon, gun in hand, threatening Kalat and Ng Choy, was sputtering excitedly:

"I didn't take my eye off that Fong more than three seconds and then, out of the tail of it, I saw him with the pistol. He was going to pot you. The old man jumped between you. Right into the bullet."

Glenn heard, opened his eyes, and tried to smile. "Couldn't let a fellow like that shoot a white man, of course," he whispered. "Got me twice, didn't he? Then I got him. Didn't quit till I got him. . . . Didn't quit. . . . I never was a quitter—when I was younger." The eyelids fluttered wearily. "When I was a man," he said. And then, after another pause: "I was a—man then, and now"—Napier thought the remainder of the sentence would never be spoken, but at last it came, hardly more than a sigh—"and now—I was—a—man—again."

Beneath the pallor of the captain's face there settled a look of great contentment and peace.

Officers from outside had come racing at the pistol shots and they were inside the room now, handcuffing Kalat and Ng Choy, searching them. Kalat had a small pistol. The Chinaman was unarmed. He had not risen from his seat during the shooting, nor had his face expressed emotion. He submitted to the search and the manacles with calm philosophy.

"Telephone for a doctor," Gordon commanded one of the policemen. "Tell him to come on the jump."

"And the coroner," Napier told them gravely,

as he rose from the still quietly smiling old captain.

A moment later some one came in through the dance hall. "There is a young lady at the door," he said. "She says she is Miss Glenn and that she has come to take her father home."

"She mustn't come into this room," Napier exclaimed. "Bring her into the dance hall." He went out and met her there, closing the door behind him.

"Why, what are you doing here?" she cried, as, after a second look she recognized him. "And why are you made up to look like a Chinaman? I came after my father. He got away."

"There is something I didn't tell you," he said, at a loss how to approach his task. "I am a Federal officer—an agent of the Treasury Department. When I told you I saw a solution, I meant a raid and the arrest of the Chinamen. Won't you sit down?"

She looked at him, only half understanding, but took the chair he indicated. "Didn't father come here?" she asked. "He always does."

"Yes," he said, and in his look of sympathetic gravity she sensed something ominous held back.

"Where is he?" she demanded. "What is the matter? What has happened?"

"I am very sorry," he told her, "but there has been an—accident. It is very serious. Very serious indeed."

"To daddy?" He inclined his head, his eyes

on hers. "What kind of an accident? Where is he?"

"Very serious indeed," he repeated. "Please sit down again," as she came to her feet. "I would give anything not to have to be the one to tell you."

"You don't mean ——" Her voice was a whisper. "He isn't *dead!*"

Slowly he nodded. "Oh!" she cried, and then a crushing explanation came into her mind and she asked, fearfully: "Do you mean he was killed? Was there a fight?"

He nodded again. "Oh, daddy!" she moaned. "And he sided with them. But you know he wasn't himself."

He saw now what trend her thoughts had taken and hastened to correct it. "He sided with *us,*" he said. "He fought for *us.* Your father saved my life."

Along with the dazed grief that she had hardly begun to comprehend, she felt the relief of a great load lifted.

"It was quite quick and painless," he said softly. "A man—one of the Chinese—killed him, and he killed the Chinaman. He realized, at the last, that he had come back to be the kind of man he used to be, and he was glad. He smiled."

"Let me see him."

"Not now. You must go home ——"

"Home," she echoed bitterly.

"Back to the hotel," he amended, "and I will

come very soon. Everything will be done that ought to be done, and I will take you to see him. I wish I could go with you this minute, but I must wait—and you had best not. I will be at the Edgemont as soon as I can get there. In less than an hour, I hope."

"I can't!" she choked. "I can't go back there alone."

"May I go with you?"

Napier had been unconscious of Madame Frezzi's presence. She came, now, to Ruth Glenn's side. Her face was neither hard nor set; her voice was not cold but soft and warm with sympathy, and there were tears rolling unhindered down her cheeks, the first, Napier thought, that she had shed for more than eight-and-forty hours.

"I would like to go," she said, and her eyes begged Napier not to forbid it. "I understand. I, too, have lost a father." And Napier felt, although her voice ceased, that her mind continued the sentence—"and a mother, and a brother, and two sisters."

"Go with her," he told Miss Glenn, "and I will come as soon as I can. This is Madame Frezzi. She will stay with you until I come."

The older woman slipped her hand through the girl's arm, and Miss Glenn leaned gratefully toward her.

"Poor daddy!" she sighed. "To go like that, here in this ——"

Napier spoke gravely. "You can be very

glad and proud of what happened at the end. You have it always to remember that he went away like a brave gentleman and soldier."

"Come soon," she said, as she followed Madame Frezzi to the door. "I want to hear the story—and to see him. I haven't a friend, you know, except you. I am all alone now."

"No," he said softly, for her ears only. "You are not alone, and you won't be, if I can help it—ever."

The look she gave him before she turned away was not all mere gratitude.

A doctor, unneeded, came soon after, and then the coroner, and an ambulance for the dead; and after that a patrol wagon, into which policemen pushed Kalat and Tung Sheng and Ng Choy. The old restaurant keeper, to the last, maintained a perfect calm, surveying all the proceedings with the detached interest of one for whom they possessed no significance. But his shallow, soulless eyes rested on Napier as he passed, and the special agent was honestly thankful that Ng Choy was not free to give commands to slant-eyed man-killers, and that the day was far distant when he would be.

With the five keys they opened the safe, and out of its opium tin they took the glinting, scintillating Ray of Light. And under the floor of the wine room, cunningly concealed, they found a hundred cans and more of opium.

When Napier and Gordon, with the two other customs agents, leaving policemen to guard the

house, finally came out and climbed into Gordon's little automobile for the trip to the Federal Building, the neighborhood, notwithstanding the hour, was buzzing with repressed excitement. Chinamen in little groups of two and three were passing and repassing the great house, on the opposite side of the street, not seeming to look toward it, clacking steadily and monotonously. There were lights in some of the near-by houses, although more were dark, but in front of every building, illuminated or in shadow, stood or walked men talking.

"The Chinese underground is going at full speed," Gordon commented. "Isn't it remarkable how news spreads with them? I'll wager there isn't a Chink in San Antonio, this side of Government Hill, who hasn't heard all the details by now—who is arrested, and who is dead, and, roughly, how it all happened."

"The Society of the Fragrant Lily isn't raided often," Napier said. "Its members keep out of trouble—by removing their enemies. Will you go over to police headquarters and attend to registering the prisoners, as soon as we have left this stuff at the office? I want to get these clothes and this stain off, and then I have a number of things to do. I'll be at the office in the morning."

They passed, when they had gone three or four blocks, a little Chinese grocery.

The building was dark, but not silent. From under the shadowy gallery at the front came

weird, discordant sounds. Loudly, screamingly, with a tempo and lilt that Napier well knew was the expression of gladsome triumph, an old man with a Chinese fiddle was joyously telling the whole world the inharmonious story of "The Running Brook at Springtime and the Little Bird in the Tree."

THE END

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